

Issue #9
July 2013

SAVAGE SINSDER

For All Things Savage

Tales of the Weird



Any World. Any Time.



PINNACLE
ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

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Tales of the Weird

Fantasy horror from the Victorian Age through World War II

By Aaron T. Huss

Welcome to the last issue of the old

publication model for Savage Insider.

Tales of the Weird marks a turning point in the magazine where we move from the free plus premium model to a standard magazine. As was previewed in *Savage Insider Deluxe #1: Modularity*, this issue features our new layout and forming methodologies and is designed to be a lot more professional and presentable from a magazine standpoint. We wanted to move away from looking like just another collection of content to a full-fledged magazine that *Savage Worlds* fans turn to on a regular basis.

When we asked our fanbase what they wanted in the next issue (for this issue), they said pulp horror. When I turned to the licensee community, few of them really new how to recreate pulp horror. Being a fan of historical fantasy horror, and fantasy horror in general, I decided we would focus on the pulp era and turn it into weird (fantasy horror). Thus *Tales of the Weird* presents fantasy horror during the pulp era and more

covering the Victorian Era through World War II.

Being a genre I'm very interested in, I grabbed hold of the flagship article, an adventure called *The Asylum*. I wanted to present Victorian fantasy horror within a location that embraces horror: an abandoned asylum! After writing the adventure, I called upon my friend Simon Powell for a map commission. Fortunately for me, he already had a Victorian mansion map (that became the asylum) and was looking to finish it. Now he had the chance!

To go along with this adventure, we turned to our licensees and freelancers to fill that historical fantasy horror content and got back some great fiction, an awesome collection of creepy masks, a very interesting delve into the Thule Society, and more! I'm very pleased with the results of this magazine and can't wait to launch the new format in *Issue #10: Make it Epic*. This upcoming issue, due out in April 2014, focuses on fantasy in numerous aspects. The articles have already been commissioned, and it's going to be fantastic!

CONTRIBUTORS

BRETT BOYKO

Brett Boyko, and Mariah Malczewska, are the designers behind *Dark Smile Games*. They are currently developing the *Fae Nightmares* urban fantasy setting for *Savage Worlds*.

CURTIS LYON

Besides his duties with *Mystical Throne Entertainment*, Curtis Lyon is a line developer for *Savage Mojo* along with being one of the three sages from *Three Sages Games*.

CHARLES WHITE

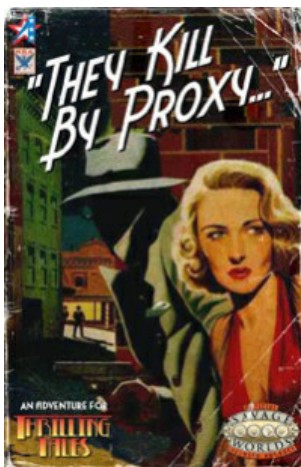
Charles White is one of the minds behind *Fabled Environments*. He has a degree in religious history and is essentially the owner of the *Divine Intervention* article series.

ACCESSORIES

METACREATOR SAVAGE WORLDS

AlterEgo Software, creator of the Metacreator RPG Character Management software, has added new hooks to handle the options available in the *Savage Worlds Horror Companion*. This is in addition to the updates they made for *Savage Worlds Deluxe* and the new edition of *50 Fathoms*.

ADAMANT ENTERTAINMENT



THRILLING TALES

Adamant Entertainment has released two new publications for Thrilling Tales, their pulp setting. The first, *The Red Menace*, is a Pulp Villain supplement detailing the Soviet Union up to the 1930s and providing a number of NPC archetypes. The second, *They Kill by Proxy*, is an extended three-part adventure for 4 – 6 Seasoned characters, with scaling for higher ranks.

ATOMIC OVERMIND PRESS

THE DAY AFTER RAGNAROK ONE-SHEETS

Following a slightly unconventional model for one-sheet adventures, Atomic Overmind Press posted a call-out for those wishing to write adventures for *The Day After Ragnarok*. Thus, instead of the free download one-sheets, they are releasing low-cost one-sheet adventures from freelancers abroad. Two new adventures have been released in this style:

Hollerin' Pines and *Wheels-up Landing*.

EVIL BEAGLE GAMES



SHAINSTAR: LEGENDS ARISE

After years of waiting and several months of Beta testing, the *Shaintar: Legends Arise* core setting and player's guides are now available from Evil Beagle Games. These new books present this epic fantasy world for characters of Novice through Veteran rank.

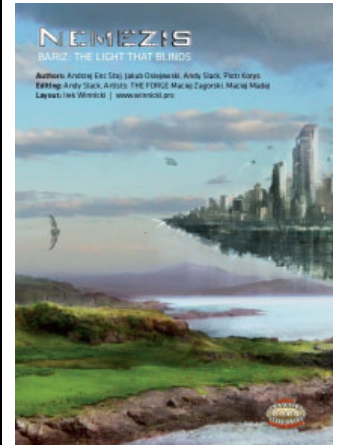
FUN SIZED GAMES

STREETS OF BEDLAM: FIVE STORY DROP

Fun Sized Games has released a collection of five new

scenarios for *Streets of Bedlam*. *Five Story Drop* brings the neo-noir world of *Streets of Bedlam* to life.

GRAMEL



SWORDS, SORCERY, AND SCI-FI

GRAMel has been busy these past few months with new content for both *Beasts & Barbarians* and *Nemesis*. Starting with their sci-fi action and adventure setting *Nemesis*, GRAMEL is growing this universe through two new sourcebooks with *Ash: Dying Planet* and *Bariz: The Light that Blinds*.

MEGA HELLFROST ADVENTURE TOME

Most people know that Triple Ace Games has a pretty solid publication models whereas their major releases consist of printed formats, typically hardcover, to support the core of their settings with a couple series of supplements and adventures (sometimes campaigns) in PDF format with print compendiums after a certain amount of time.

In an interesting twist of Hellfrost epic fantasy

goodness, Triple Ace Games has pulled together their Hellfrost PDF adventures and compiled them into a single, limited edition hardcover (it's really more of a massive tome at 580 pages). Titled *Adventure Compendium*, this new hardcover was available for pre-order through the Triple Ace Games webstore, and most likely will not be available outside of this pre-order (maybe the occasional convention?). For those

interested in campaigns, the *Saga of the Frost Giants* mini-campaign is included.

As Triple Ace Games winds down on the first continent of Hellfrost and gears up for the second, a couple more supplements have straggled in including a new *Creature Guide*, covering *Frost Giants*, and a new Player Supplement, presenting an *Organization Guide* filled with organizations for the PCs to join.

Additionally, Triple Ace Games continues their support of the

Showdown Savage Worlds war game with their fifth Faction Pack for *G-Men & Gangsters*, detailing the Chicago Bunnies.



HISTORY WITH A TWIST

We at Mystical Throne Entertainment have been very busy these past three months. After releasing several *Savage Insider* Premium extractions, such as the *Hastilion Expanse Compendiums*, we have decided to pull together all non-extracted content into a single, deluxe issue along with releasing some of the last pieces for extraction.

With that in mind, Mystical Throne Entertainment has three new publications including the 100+ page *Savage Insider Deluxe Issue #1: Modularity*, packed with all types of Savage Worlds

content for players and GMs, serving as an excellent companion. Additionally, the first two *Shadow Journal* PDFs have been released, with an extraction of *The Burning Crow* and *Of Orchids and Oaths*, both for *Judgment Day* and any other modern Shadowed Earth setting. The former offers a beast cult while the latter is an adventure set in the 1930s.

As Mystical Throne Entertainment prepares to launch *Shadowed Earth* and re-launch *Faith & Demons: The Rising* and *Judgment Day*, the last *Nation Guide*, detailing *Croatia*, has been

released. Further content for *Faith & Demons: The Rising* will be moved until after the re-launch. To support the release of the *Shadowed Earth* core setting guide, a new website has been put together, as a place to find great new Shadowed Earth along with all free downloads. Visit:

mysticalthrone-ent.com/shadowedearth

Finally, our latest Ultimate Guide supplement is available with a delve into ancient China in the *Ultimate Three Kingdoms Guide*. Written by historian Christopher J.N. Banks, this

new Ultimate Guide is akin to the *Ultimate Roman Legions Guide* with a look at military history during the Three Kingdoms era.



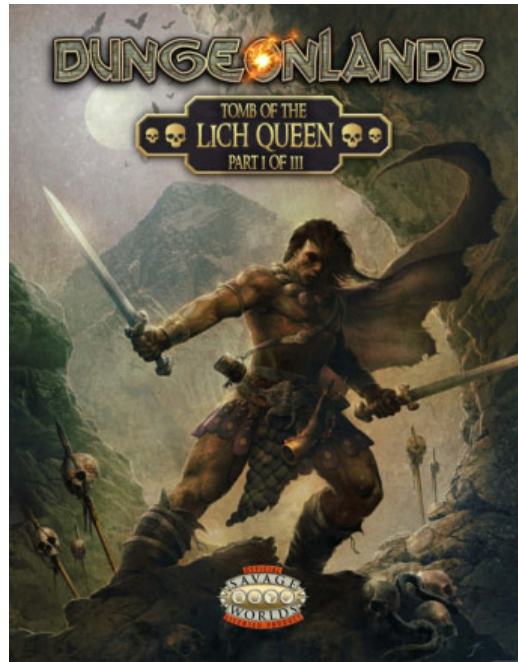
EXPANDING THE SUZERAIN UNIVERSE

The collaborative minds at Savage Mojo have been busy lately with their continuing expansion of the Suzerain Universe. For starters, the Kickstarter-backed *Dungeonlands* setting, an epic fantasy setting, has been seeing multiple releases. As of late, the big release is the *Tomb of the Lich Queen* campaign, part 1, and its associated accessories. These accessories include map tiles, encounter cards, and gamemaster cards.

Possibly not as widely known, but no less important, are the releases of two other new settings based in Suzerain: *Set Rising* and *Clockwork Dreams*. Tempted to find out more? Both of these settings have free Primers available from the Savage Mojo website and DriveThruRPG / RPGNow.

Clockwork Dreams appears to be a fantasy steampunk setting with clockwork and alchemy elements. *Set Rising*

is a bit more difficult to describe, but the best I can see is that it's sci-fi fantasy with a mixture of Egyptian mythology. Download the Primer releases for more information, and watch for additional releases from Savage Mojo covering both of these settings, and the upcoming *Dungeonlands* core setting guide.



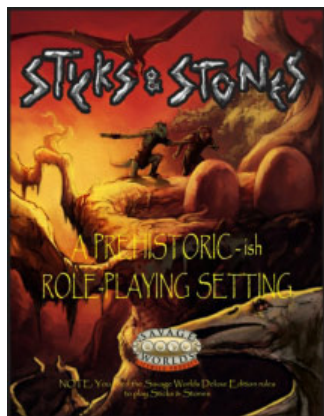
GRAMEL has also launched a new adventure series for Beasts & Barbarians called *Heroic Tales*. The first Heroic Tale, *The Crying Mother*, is placed within Jalizar and is supported by a free download: *Archetypes of the Dominions and Jalizar*.

GUN METAL GAMES

INTERFACE ZERO 2.0 BETA HACKING

After a successful Kickstarter campaign, Gun Metal Games has been busy hacking [pun intended] away at getting *Interface Zero 2.0* put together. Besides the various releases, they have put together a Beta testing version of the new Hacking rules for everyone to download.

JADE TOWER STUDIO



GROG SAY "BUY THIS"

In an interesting twist of the Savage Worlds license, Jade Tower Studio has launched a prehistoric fantasy setting called *Sticks & Stones*, including a core setting guide and figure flats. This prehistoric setting takes a lighter look at the world of gaming and adds a little fun into your Savage Worlds games.

KICKSTARTER

CHARACTER SHEET PAD

Something commonly found in RPG games for the past 30 years, and missing in Savage Worlds, is a pad of character sheets. Gold Piece Publications, a frequent visitor in the OSR realm, ran a successful Kickstarter campaign for a pad of 25 character sheets. Hopefully we'll see these in general release.

MODIPHUIS ENTERTAINMENT



THE TRELLBORG MONSTROSITIES

Modiphius Entertainment continues to delve further into their *Achtung! Cthulhu* setting, for use with *Realms of Cthulhu*, by breaking away from the regular campaign series and releasing a standalone adventure module. *The Trellborg Monstrosities* is a new adventure based on the novel of the same name, written by John Houlihan.

PINNACLE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

GRIM PRAIRIE TRAILS

Pinnacle Entertainment Group is breathing extra life into your *Deadlands* adventures and campaigns with its new adversary supplement, *Grim Prairie*

Trails. This new supplement contains a host of new adversaries along with a *Savage Tale* for each of those adversaries.

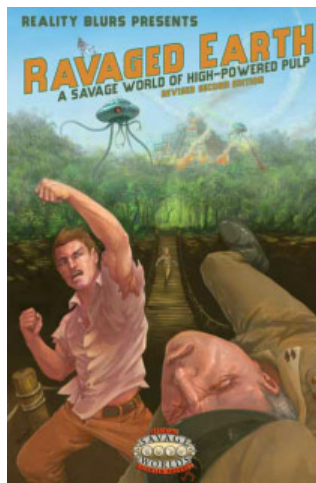


PLAIN BROWN WRAPPER GAMES

THE STING OF DEATH

Plain Brown Wrapper Games has released a *Savage Worlds* edition of their *The Sting of Death* superhero mini-campaign. This 7-part epic adventure is setting agnostic.

REALITY BLURS



RAVAGED EARTH, 2ND EDITION

The long-awaited *Ravaged Earth* core setting guide 2nd edition, from Reality Blurs, is now available. This expanded and revised version of *Ravaged Earth* includes a 12-

part plot point campaign, expanded Edges, and more!

STORYWEAVER

HISTORICAL HORROR AND HIGH-SPACE

StoryWeaver continues its standard releases with two new one this past three months. The first is the continuation of their historical horror adventures, set during the Vietnam War, with the *Blood of the Innocent* follow-on module, *InfestAsia*. This new module is playable as a standalone or as a continuation of the previous module.

Additionally, StoryWeaver continues their support of their High-Space sci-fi setting with a new adventure module called *Euphoria*. This module is a type of introductory adventure, called Game-in-a-Can, which aids in establishing The Lantern setting of High-Space.

SUPER GENIUS GAMES

NEW STRIKE FORCE 7 GEAR

In a similar fashion to its many Pathfinder releases, Super Genius Games has launched a series of mini-supplements supporting their Strike Force 7 setting for *Savage Worlds*. This new series, called *Airdrop*, kicks off with *5 Pieces of Retaliatory Gear*, offering new equipment for team members.

THE ENEMY IN THE SHADOWS

Herr Schroeder looked impassively at the scenes of horror that surrounded him. The torn and bloody, and in some cases partially pulped, remains of bodies lay strewn across the floor of what had once been a factory workshop.

The now silent machines were bathed in gloomy half light that struggled to make its way through the boarded up windows. He sighed as he knelt over the remains of what had once been a German stormtrooper. The face was a mask of crimson and the body from the shoulders down had been sliced open; the ribs and organs were exposed.

He clamped his mouth shut and fought back the bile rising in his throat. He was a war veteran, and he had seen men who had suffered terrible injuries from being riddled with bullets or ripped apart by shrapnel, but there was something decidedly unnatural about what had happened to these brave men of the Fatherland.

He turned on his heel and headed to the relative calm of the outside world. Two men fell in beside him as he ascended the stairs and walked out into the war torn street. Snow crunched under his boots as he took a deep lungful of the cold, crisp winter air. His stomach lurched right then.

Schroeder managed to find the ruins of a wall to vomit behind, retaining some dignity. Once the heaving convulsions had ceased, he produced a hip flask and took a cleansing swig of Schnapps. It was as he walked out from behind the wall that something struck him: of the twelve or so bodies in the factory, some of them had been Russian.

Whatever struck down the men from the platoon also took out the Soviets that had been fighting to stop the area from falling into the hands of the Reich. Something was killing indiscriminately and that worried him to the core of his being.

The staff car wound its way through the streets of Stalingrad. The men sat in the back and watched the war torn landscape scrolling past, each lost in his own thoughts. Herr Schroeder sat looking wan, his hands resting on the right knee of his crossed legs.

He regarded the men seated either side of him through the corners of his eyes. To his left sat Dr. Max Hellinger, a thin vulture of a man with cheekbones that looked sharp enough to slice paper, and a prominent hooked nose. When he smiled, he displayed yellowed teeth that reminded Schroeder of crooked tombstones in an ill kept graveyard.

To his right sat Commandant Kerchner. Short with closely cropped dark hair, his face was marred by a jagged scar that resembled an SS lightning bolt in reverse; one eye was a milky grey, the other a piercing icy blue. Like the Fuhrer, he was of Austrian descent, but lacked his electrifying charisma. If he was honest, that charisma was beginning to wear thin; the impassioned words carrying slightly less conviction with every month this war dragged on by.

A smart man like Schroeder had recognized a basic fact, brutal in its simplicity: they could not win the battle for Stalingrad. Germany was taking

heavy casualties in Moscow and Leningrad and only in Saint Petersburg had the Reich made any advances, but that was a tortuously slow process. With this revelation came another stark dose of reality: they could not win this war.

The scales had shifted against them some time ago. Rumor had it a secret communication had been sent to Berlin some six months ago, offering Hitler the chance to surrender. The offer had been met with scorn. Schroeder now began to wish Hitler had acquiesced.

Schroeder longed to be back in the family home that nestled in the hills overlooking the River Rhine. He missed his charming wife and bright young son, Eric, and his daughter, Elsa. He fought back the temptation to reach for his wallet and study their photographs.

Kerchner would not hide his contempt at what he would see as a sign of weakness toward Schroeder, and he did not know or care what Dr. Hellinger would make of it. Instead, Schroeder closed his eyes and imagined holding his wife close and ruffling his children's hair. For a brief moment, he thought he could actually hear them laughing before a sharply spoken word snapped him back to reality.

Hellinger was looking at him, with a frown, "Are you alright?"

Schroeder smiled thinly, "I'm tired and have a slight headache. I'll be fine"

"I can give you something for the headache, if you wish?"

"Thank you, Herr Doctor, but no, I'll be alright"

Hellinger nodded slowly. Schroeder ignored the slight grunt that came from Kerchner. 'Go to hell,' he thought, but

then almost smiled as he provided his own counterpoint, 'no need, we are already there.'

The car swept into a courtyard of what had once been some sort of municipal building; it was now the headquarters for his superiors. These men had been sent to supervise the taking of Stalingrad. Perhaps they had been sent here as some sort of punishment, Schroeder mused silently to himself.

He had encountered a squad of soldiers comprised of convicts sent here from the prisoner of war camps. One of them had been Polish, and there had even been a black man in the troop. Incredible, he thought; that was how bad things truly were, how desperate things were getting as a whole.

Hell's bells! He tried to stop himself, but a short bark of laughter escaped his lips. One of those soldiers had been spared from the firing squad.

This time both the doctor and Kerchner scowled at him openly. Schroeder said nothing. He merely fixed his gaze straight ahead and ascended the stairs leading to the brass handled, dark wooden doors. One of the two guards flanking the doors snapped off a salute and pushed one of the doors open. Schroeder nodded in acknowledgment and picked up his pace as he approached the office at the end of the marbled corridor.

His boots clicked hollowly as he walked down the black and white checkered floor. He ignored the portraits that stared down at him impassively from the walls and disregarded the statues that were set on pedestals in recessed alcoves.

He glanced up at the chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, casting miniature rainbows on the walls of the corridor. Through a window, he noticed snow falling again in a light flurry. Judging by the way the wind was keening, it would, once again, practically become a blizzard by late afternoon or early evening. He felt sorry for all the

men still out on the streets fighting, quickly realizing, with something tantamount to shock, he also felt the same for the Soviets defending their city.

Schroeder entered the office and snapped a sharp salute, bringing his heels together with a crisp click. The man behind the table grunted and waved a hand at him to sit down.

Schroeder watched as the man rubbed his unshaven jowls with the palms of his hands, bunched his fists, and knuckled his pale, rheumy gray eyes. He shifted his bulk in the seat and perched a pair of spectacles on the bridge of a bulbous nose, which looked as if it had been broken at least twice and had not been set correctly either time.

Some scrap of memory reminded Schroeder that before the wall, Klaus Heidenreich had been a talented heavyweight boxer. Now it looked as if he would not be able to physically get through the first round of a fight with a school boy. Still, appearances could be deceptive and so often were.

"Report" Heidenreich commanded.

Schroeder sighed, "It's the same as the last two times. Both Soviet and German soldiers torn to pieces by an unknown third party. There is no way that it can be the work of a single man; it must be a group of men. "Maybe it's a bunch of escaped psychopaths from an asylum, or a group of real desperate convicts. I really have no idea."

"It's about time you did!" snapped Heidenreich, accentuating his statement with a hard slam of his fist upon the table.

Heidenreich sat back looking perplexed. "Two times? This is the third? Why wasn't I informed of this when they sent me to this frozen hellhole? Tell me about the first two incidents!"

Schroeder frowned. This was something he did not relish doing. The first time this came to light was after a survivor of an assault on a Russian rocket emplacement had willingly

surrendered to German soldiers. He told some barely coherent story of how they had come under attack from something that came out of nowhere, howled like a banshee, and ripped apart anything or anyone that got in its way. He could not describe the thing exactly; he only said it was as black as pitch, with eyes that shone like rubies, even in the darkness of the night.

They held him in the cells for several nights, and that had been a mistake. The prisoner spent the entire night shivering and crying, or howling, like a beaten hound. He soiled the sheets and gouged his flesh with his nails. This went on for three nights until, on the morning of the fourth day as they tried to beat more information out of him, he lunged for a guard. Before anyone could stop him, he placed the guards loaded gun in his mouth and blew the back of his head off.

The second time, Schroeder himself had been close to the truth, a little too close.

It had been an impasse. The Russian troops had been ensconced in an abandoned residential building. Snipers positioned at windows and on the roofs picked off any German soldier that dared show himself, either accidentally or at the orders of his superiors.

If that didn't stop them from advancing, there was the threat of at least one heavy machine gun that raked the street in devastating arcing sweeps. The Russians were more than content to just sit there and let the Germans advance on their position.

It reminded Schroeder of the stalemate at the hillside monastery of Monte Casino. He was only too glad he had not been there, but had read the reports afterward and was sad for some colleagues transferred there. Many good men lost their lives in that battle.

On the day it happened, the weather was alternating between cold showers of sleet and snow flurries. It was not just cold, but literally freezing. Men had tears frozen to their eyelashes, or mucus

hung like crystal glass pears from their nostrils.

It was hard to breathe, each inhalation cutting them to the core. Their hands were constantly numb, even wrapped up or gloved. They dared not touch bare metal with exposed skin, lest they freeze to the barrels of their guns or the side of any vehicle.

Several men knew they had frostbite, and toes and fingers were under constant threat of amputation. Indeed, one man already lost two fingers from his left hand, and one was in serious jeopardy to his right.

Schroeder checked his gun for what must have been the twelfth time in at least half as many minutes. It paid to continually work the mechanism or the damned thing could freeze. Even gun oil wasn't safe from the sub-zero weather.

He looked up as a large hulk of a man hunkered down beside him. He acknowledged the man's presence with a slight nod of the head.

"Cigarette?" the big man asked.

Schroeder shook his head.

"Suit yourself," the big man grunted. "The good captain thinks we might be able to make an attempt on taking the building across the street tonight. Seems there's a chance of fog. We could use that as cover."

"If it's as thick as it was the other night, we won't be able to see where the hell we are going", Schroeder mumbled.

"True, but it does mean the bastards can't see us."

Schroeder smiled, "Why didn't he think of that the other night?"

"He's our commanding officer because the last two squad leaders all 'bought it' as the Americans would say. It's not our fault he's twice as stupid as he is ugly."

'Speak for yourself,' Schroeder thought but kept quiet.

The large man struck a match and lit his cigarette. Schroeder regarded him casually and, to his shame, struggled to remember the man's name. He had been a survivor of a platoon that encountered a Russian foot patrol four

night's previously. Schroeder's unit had taken them all in to help bolster their numbers.

Schroeder realized the cover of fog could be a godsend though. He doubted it, but yes, it might work. Even now he could see a mist descending that promised to thicken nicely within the next hour or so.

Schroeder checked his weapon while the big man took a whetstone to the edge of his military dagger. He suddenly recalled the man's name: Kessler, yes, that was it. Kessler blew a smoke ring and reached into his pocket.

"Maybe some chocolate?"

"Where the hell did you get that from?" Schroeder asked while nodding the affirmative.

"Found it on a dead Russian. Keep it quiet, we're not supposed to take stuff like this off them."

Schroeder sat back, accepting the offer and savoring the bitter sweet taste. It would be some time before he would experience a luxury like that again.

The call to arms came just after midnight. Schroeder had dozed off, as had Kessler who, for some reason, had decided that Schroeder was the best company he could find that night. A not-too-gentle nudge from their commander's boot woke them both.

"If we are going to do this, we might as well do it now. We'll split into two squads, and move in as quietly as possible. The fog has lifted slightly, but I think it'll hold long enough. Besides, once we're in that building, it won't matter. Chances are it'll be hand-to-hand fighting, which suits me. We'll salvage what ammunition we can from them, seeing as our own stocks are so low.

"You and Kessler here will be in the second squad, hitting the building from the left flank. Klaus has worked out that there's a way through via the building

next door. Chances are the Russians may have thought about that. They have many faults, but stupidity isn't one of them. Even if there are no troops in that building, they may have laid traps, so watch for trip wires.

"The first squad will hit from the right flank. They have to be in the open, so consider yourselves lucky. If it works, we can hit them hard and fast and have that building secured within a half hour."

Kessler stretched and flexed his neck. It cracked with a sound that made Schroeder wince. "What strategic difference will this make?"

"I should report you for insolence! The strategic difference is that we'll be alive when the sun comes up to burn away the rest of the fog!"

Kessler at least had the decency to look abashed at the reprimand.

"Get ready to move. We go in ten minutes."

To say the next ten minutes were amongst the longest in Schroeder's life was an understatement. Even worse however, was the slow, stealthy approach they had to make as they crossed the street. The Russians may not be able to see them, but the slightest noise would alert them on a night as still as this.

They could still do some very serious damage with the heavy machine guns, even if the Germans were more or less invisible.

Schroeder's nerves were on edge. He wished he could ask for a cigarette to calm them, but it was too late for that. A subdued torch glimmered twice. That was the signal to go.

They kept as low and moved as quietly as they could. Kessler, for a man of his size, was as silent as a cat. Schroeder could not help but be impressed. Kessler smiled to him from over his shoulder, and in his eagerness to engage the enemy, pulled ahead.

Schroeder flicked the safety catch of his pistol to the off position and eased a round into the chamber. He suddenly

heard Kessler give a bull like roar and followed the staccato rattle of his MP3 machine gun. To his left, a fellow soldier snapped off two rounds from his Luger and a shadowy figure dropped out of sight, a red haze forming a halo around his head.

A bullet pinged off the brickwork close to Schroeder's face causing him to flinch as fragments of brick and plaster showered him. He fired back blindly at a form in front of him that rose out of the gloom. Its arm was raised and he saw an entrenching tool swinging towards him.

He shot the Russian in the belly and put a second round through his chest. More shots shattered the night, muzzle flashes flashed briefly, parting the gloom.

Suddenly, it all became deathly quiet.

Schroeder felt as though he was submerged in icy cold water. He seemed to be moving in slow motion; sound seemed muffled and distorted. Reality itself seemed to *shift*. He couldn't explain it as he was suddenly frightened beyond reason.

His fellow soldiers disappeared from his view. He couldn't hear the gunshots or battle cries anymore. The sounds of the wounded and dying were now nothing but echoes receding into the distance.

Schroeder tried to call out, but his voice died in his throat as something drifted into his line of sight. A black amorphous shape vaguely resembling a human being stood in front of him. He could discern no facial features apart from two ruby red flames that may have been its eyes. Its head was framed by tendrils of long black hair that floated in the air. It was like looking at the shadowy form of a drowning woman.

And then he heard it, "Who mourns for Mother Russia?"

He couldn't form an answer, couldn't think clearly, and couldn't move. The figure suddenly rushed towards him. The only sound he heard was his own scream echoing in the darkness.

When he came to, Schroeder could not tell how long he had been unconscious. His watch had somehow broken during the battle. His head was spinning; his heart was pounding in his chest. 'At least I'm alive,' he thought.

He fought a wave of nausea, and opened his eyes, immediately wishing he hadn't. He saw the body of Kessler, laying like a marionette whose strings had been cut. His neck, legs, and arms twisted into impossible angles, and that was not the worst of it. His stomach had been slashed open; his insides had spilled onto his lap.

Schroeder shut his eyes against the sight and attempted to ascertain if he was the only survivor. The man to his right had gotten off lightly compared to Kessler; he had only been decapitated. Then it dawned on him; the next two bodies he saw, that only bore the vaguest resemblance to human beings, were Russian. "What the hell?" he muttered.

He stopped dead in his tracks, hearing movement up ahead. Had someone survived this slaughter? Or had the shadowy figure returned to take his life? Schroeder went to draw his pistol and then swore softly; his gun was missing. He reached for his knife, finding it still there.

Schroeder unsheathed the blade as quietly as he could and took a tentative step forward. Another step, and again he swore as a stone turned under his boot, or a piece of glass broke as he stepped on it, which one he could not tell. But the other person, if it was actually a person, halted. Schroeder kept as calm as he could even though he expected to feel the impact of a bullet at any moment.

The voice that called out to him spoke in German.

Relief washed over Schroeder as he stepped forward, his arm raised in greeting. He saw the tall, gaunt, blond-haired man in front of him, looking at the scene in abject horror. His uniform was red, not field grey. Schroeder could

not tell if the blood was his or that of the others around him. Had this man gone mad and turned on his comrades? No, it was that shadow thing, of that he was sure of. He had not imagined it, though he had hoped to God that he had, but the two men were not alone.

They turned as two Russians came into view. For a moment they all stood there, frozen like figures captured in a photograph. None were in a fit state to fight. One was missing his arm from just below the elbow, the stump wrapped in some sort of makeshift bandaging. They looked at the Germans, then at the corpses around them, and raising hands in placating gestures, backed away.

"Wait!" Schroeder called out. To his surprise they actually stopped and regarded him with suspicion.

"What the hell happened here?" he asked in a coarse voice. His English was not good, but good enough.

"She came," one of them replied.

"Who? Who came?" Schroeder asked.

The man with the missing arm answered this time, and to his horror, he had heard the words before. "Who mourns for Mother Russia?" With that they turned and stumbled away out of sight.

Two days later, a passing patrol found Schroeder and his fellow soldier. They were closer to their own lines than they had thought. Schroeder readily accepted the offer of dry rations and water, but insisted that he would take neither until he had reported to someone of superior rank. One glance at the haunted look on his face convinced the captain of the patrol to comply with his demands.

Heidenreich listened to the tale impassively. He sucked air through his clenched teeth and exhaled loudly. "Let me get this straight. This thing, for want of a better word, is not only killing our men, but the Russians too?"

"Ja," Schroeder replied softly.

"Why? It makes no sense at all," said Heidenreich.

"And my idea as to how we might be best able to solve this problem will make even less sense," said Schroeder, a cold ball of ice settling in his stomach. Heidenreich was not going to like this, not one little bit.

"Go on," Heidenreich said.

"We work with the Russians. We hunt this thing down, flush it out of hiding, and kill it."

Heidenreich looked thunderstruck and began to laugh. He paused just long enough to tell Schroeder to get the hell out of his office.

Schroeder walked into the pale, insipid sunshine and took in the cold, still air. He turned as he heard the crunching of gravel under the heels of approaching boots. The figure that walked towards him was tall and slender, and it took him a few moments to realize that the figure was a woman.

She wore a long gray trench coat that covered a well made jacket. Beneath it, she wore a snow white blouse accompanied by a narrow black tie. A skirt that ended just below the knee completed the ensemble. A furry cap was perched on top of her auburn hair. Schroeder noted that she was striking rather than attractive. Her cheekbones were sharp; her eyes the color of slate. Her lips were thin and when she smiled, her teeth were as straight as a picket fence and as white as the fresh snow on the ground.

"Captain Schroeder," she said with a trace of a smile playing across her face. It was a statement, not a question. He nodded curtly in response.

"My name is Maxine Fleischner." She paused to take a small silver case out of her pocket, producing a cigarette and offering one to Schroeder. He declined the offer. She lit the cigarette and took a drag, exhaling slowly. "We need to talk."

"We do?" he replied, as a strange feeling of apprehension began to creep over him.

"Yes we do. I'm from the O.S.S." she said as if this would explain everything.

Schroeder frowned. The name O.S.S. was familiar to him somehow; he just couldn't put a finger on why. He felt awkward as the silence lengthened.

"Follow me. We can talk while we walk."

She smiled, but the lack of warmth in it made Schroeder wish he was anywhere but here. A small voice in his mind said that being with someone like Himmler would be preferable to this.

Fleischner continued to smoke as she walked beside Schroeder. She tried to get a little closer to him but Schroeder edged away from her. He neither knew nor cared if his behavior offended her.

"The O.S.S. was established by the Fuhrer just after the outbreak of the war. He has a belief that there are powers that exist beyond our world that could aid us in securing a victory and ending this war."

He had heard rumors that Hitler had been consulting psychics and so-called mediums and had a library of occult works locked away somewhere in Berlin. There apparently was an officially recognized astrologist on his war cabinet. So Hitler believed in rabbits' feet and not walking under ladders, Schroeder thought. Just what in the name of hell did any of that have to do with him?

He waited for this strange woman to carry on speaking. She took a deep breath before continuing. "The O.S.S. specializes in researching the occult, Captain. Such powers as our beloved leader believes in do exist."

Schroeder snorted involuntarily. In response, she stopped dead in her tracks and rounded on him.

"I would have thought that, with your current experiences still fresh in your mind, Captain, you would at least be more open to what I have just said. I didn't think you would have a closed mind."

"I don't," he replied calmly. She started to say something. "No, please do not interrupt me, Fraulein. I am a God-fearing man. I was a regular church goer, and I pray every morning and night.

Once back home, I will fall on my knees and offer praise to the good Lord above that I have made it through this hell. But when you start talking about fortune tellers, stargazers, and people who can talk to the dead, I find it hard to accept. And yes, I did encounter something strange and yes, I cannot explain what it was that I saw.

"I am certain that whatever it was can be explained away by natural means. Maybe it's a mentally scarred survivor, a refugee, an escaped prisoner of war with mental health problems. Maybe it's..."

She placed the palm of her hand on his chest, stopping him from taking another step. "There is a man walking beside you now. No, let me continue. He is tall and walking with the aid of a stick. His right leg was injured by shrapnel during the Great War, but he died between the wars. He had respiratory problems towards the end and hated the fact that his sight was so poor that he could no longer enjoy his Charles Dickens collection. His name is Gerhardt. He called you 'his little apple' as a boy. He says it's because your cheeks were so red."

Schroeder brushed away her hand.

"Please wait! There is more!"

"Get away from me!" he yelled. "Just get the hell away from me!"

She threw back her head and hissed. "We'll meet again Captain" she called out.

"Oh? And who told you that? A deck of cards, chicken gizzards, or your black cat?"

She hurried after him; "No, our sector chief here in Stalingrad. Like it or not, we have to work together, otherwise more brave German men will have to die than is necessary."

He wheeled abruptly, "That hasn't already happened? Leave me the hell alone. I don't care who sent you. I'll sort this out. I don't need crucifixes and Holy Water. I am sure that a bullet right between its eyes will put an end to this once and for all."

She sighed and indicated that he could carry on. Through clenched teeth she muttered, "We will meet again, my friend."

Schroeder walked away, his mind reeling and his stomach churning. She had described his dead grandfather. She had somehow known his grandfather's nickname for him as a child. How? How the hell had she known that? Could she really see dead people? Was his grandfather walking beside him now? He turned to his left and feeling a little foolish, addressed the empty air.

"Give me a sign," he said softly. "Speak to me. Prove to me here and now that you are here." Nothing; not a sound, no strange lights in the air before him. No sudden apparitions appearing out of the ether.

"Just as I thought." He reached for his own packet of cigarettes, and paused. For just a moment, a strong, bitter sweet, pungent odor wafted across his face: the smell of his grandfather's favorite pipe tobacco. He thought he had imagined it, but a second waft of it, stronger and sharper than before, hit him head on, as if someone had exhaled it full into his face.

Four days later, Schroeder was with another group of brave young men. These men were gaunt, pale, and disheveled, but there was no doubting that the fire that fueled their desire for victory was still burning strongly within. He envied their youth, but he only wanted to get out of here. He just wanted this war over and done with. Schroeder had to mask his despair, hide his disillusionment for the sake of these boys, and for perhaps his own safety.

One of the young men had a fervent belief in the Reich, the war, and that victory would be theirs. He was the kind of man that would report Schroeder to the S.S. at any given excuse. The young man's passion meant he would be as dangerous as any Russian soldier.

Schroeder would have to watch his step very carefully indeed. Even now the sullen looking man, with dark hair and deep brooding eyes, was watching him as they ate their rations. Schroeder refused to turn away, even though meeting the man's eyes made him squirm internally.

This Corporal Kleitz scared him and it was obvious to anyone that he worried others in the platoon as well. And just when he thought it couldn't get any worse, the sound of an approaching motor vehicle broke in on his thoughts. A small black saloon car, with blackened windows, had pulled up on the other side of the street. It was under the escort of two motorcycle outriders. As the car door opened, several heads turned towards it.

Schroeder was certain who was in the car, long before the woman swung her legs out of the vehicle. Maxine Fleischner looked right at him and gave a thin smile. A cold block of ice formed in the pit of his stomach. A soldier gave a wolf whistle and abruptly stopped as if having belatedly thought better of it.

Without hesitation, Maxine walked across the street and addressed the leader of the squad. His new squad leader's back stiffened as if scalded and turned angrily away from her. He approached the squad. "Gentlemen, we are now under Fraulein Fleischner's command." This statement was met with stunned silence. What followed hit Schroeder like a physical blow.

"And you, Schroeder, are promoted to second lieutenant, and will only take orders from the Fraulien. Is that clear?"

He nodded dumbly and did his best to ignore Kleitz's withering glare.

A couple hours later, Schroeder and his squad were moving with extreme caution through a twisting, narrow back alleyway. The squad had been briefed by Fleischner, but she had taken Schroeder to one side and told him what she couldn't and wouldn't tell the rest of the squad. It had not made him feel at ease

at all. He wanted to run, to hide, but he could not. He replayed the recent conversation in his mind.

They had been sitting in the doorway of an abandoned shop. She had produced a black leather bound book from inside a satchel that she had been carrying slung over one shoulder.

"I think we have made a significant discovery. After our last meeting, a group of soldiers encountered a group of Russian resistance fighters. The fact that our problem leaves witnesses to its attacks seems to have, for once, worked in our favor. We questioned both groups of survivors and it took time, but we managed to piece together the tale of what happened. To be short, they came upon each other purely by chance.

"Both groups found cover, where they spent several minutes futilely exchanging fire. Our men got taken by surprise as they came under a head-on attack. The Soviets were brutal by all accounts, but our men gave as good as they could. Then something unexpected happened.

"The attack happened in the early afternoon, but all of the soldiers swear on their mother's deathbeds that the light faded, until it seemed they were fighting at dusk."

He nodded. "That's what happened with us. Although the one attack was after the sun had set, it did seem to get darker."

She opened the book to a place marked by a broad green leather bookmark. Despite himself, Schroeder craned his neck to see what was on display. One page was full of indecipherable text, the other full of illustrations. He looked at it and again, that icy feeling of dread settled in his gut.

The image was that of a female floating above a field, terrorizing peasant farmers armed with pitchforks. The body was small, indicating a child, or at least a girl in her early teens judging by her physique, but what drew him, and repulsed him at the same time, was the woman's face.

It was the face of a gap-toothed, deeply wrinkled and wart encrusted hag looking back at him from the page. The face was not framed by white or silvery grey hair; it was surrounded by a halo of lustrous black hair. Its slender and graceful arms ended in gnarled fingers, tipped with vicious talons rather than nails.

"Mein Gott," he hissed. "That's what we saw, or something very much like it. What is it?"

"Not what. Who?" she said.

He looked up sharply at her, and met her eyes.

"Look at the text under the picture. We have penciled in a translation for you."

He turned his eyes with great reluctance, back to the illustration.

"Mother Russia," he read aloud. "Or Baba Yaga"

"She protects the country," she said softly. "But she doesn't only appear in Russian texts. This book comes from Yugoslavia. There are similar tales of such a creature throughout Eastern Europe. We even have a similar entity in German folklore. She's both revered and reviled in equal measure in the mountains of Bavaria.

"She protects the country like the English legend of Britannia, but unlike that noble woman, she punishes those she feels has let the country down. And that is what she is doing; at least that's the theory." Fleischner paused letting Schroeder mill over the information.

After a while he spoke. "So this Mother Russia, or Baba Yaga, is

punishing us for invading her country, and shedding the blood of her children as she sees fit?"

A nod. She waited in silence and he realized she was encouraging him to carry on. "And she is reprimanding her people for failing to drive us out of Stalingrad?"

She smiled, but the smile held no warmth. "Not just Stalingrad. There have been similar incidents in Moscow, Irkutsk, and St. Petersburg. There have also been strange reports submitted from our units in more isolated locations."

Schroeder grunted. "She sure gets around"

"Yes she does," she replied.

"So what do we do about this? I suggested we work with the Russians."



"I know. Not a bad idea in some ways, but surely you knew that was never going to happen," Fleischner replied.

"I was desperate, I admit it," he said, almost apologetically.

"Don't be sorry. We are aware that we had to cooperate with the French Resistance against something that was making life difficult for all concerned in Paris."

He felt his eyebrows rise in surprise. He almost sat there gaping when she added, "Never mind the fact that German and British planes were bothered by something that had been unleashed over the English Channel during the Battle of Britain, as they are now calling it. We cooperated with the R.A.F and dealt with it."

"But the Russians are—"

"Too proud to consider helping." She finished the statement for him.

"But what choice do they, or we, have?" he asked.

Fleischner stood up straight and put the book away. "None at all, but the solution is not the obvious one."

He didn't like the sound of that.

They walked back slowly towards the squad, their heads close together in conversation. Kleitz leered at them. Maybe he thought they were arranging a tryst, Schroeder thought, but he didn't give a damn what Kleitz or anyone else thought or imagined.

Fleischner had just given him a solution to their problem and he hated what he heard. They had concocted a plan in the last few minutes, and with it a cover story for what was to come. If they told the unit the truth, he wouldn't be surprised, or indeed wouldn't be able to blame them, if they opened fire and cut them both down where they stood.

Schroeder heard what Fleischner said and took it in the best he could in the time allowed. She explained that she was what was known as a Blood Mage and Baba Yaga needed a sacrifice to placate her. Schroeder had been incredulous at this statement and understandably so.

"The dismemberment and decapitation of men from both sides isn't enough for her?"

"No," Fleischner said simply. "Had this come to light earlier, then we may have been able to avoid it with what we call a level one intervention, a banishing ritual if you like. Mind you, that may have only been a temporary measure, but it would have given us some breathing room to prepare for a possible return."

He nodded grimly. "I understand. Anyone reporting this may have found themselves where doctors would have started picking their brains apart, I suppose."

Fleischner smiled without humor. "Something like that." She did not

elaborate, and for that he was grateful; he was not at all grateful for what was to come.

"We now need an exorcism. More than a simple banishment, we need to send it back to whatever hell it came from. To do that we need, or should I say I need, to perform a level three ritual. It will mean a lot of men will have to endure pain while I perform the ritual. It must *not* be allowed to get to me. Is that clear?"

He nodded. The squad would have to be a human shield for Fleischner. It means these men have to be the equivalent of a Judas Goat, and he hated that more than anything. It even galled him that the Russians would be part of the ritual and ignorant of the fact. It was the ultimate irony: an invading army would have to do something terrible to save the countrymen of the nation they had invaded for the sake of a man who wasn't even German. They said that war was the ultimate form of madness; this was the definitive proof of that.

The plan was to be implemented in two stages. Fleischner needed Schroeder to draw the Russians out of hiding and lure them to an area she had prepared before rendezvousing with the unit. The battleground would be (and this in itself seemed sacrilegious) the ruins of an old church she had found. Fleischner had already performed some minor ritual of some sort that would, in theory at least, trap the enraged spirit and bind it to the church and its grounds.

He had taken in as much information as he could absorb. She had sanctified the area again, with some sort of circle marked out in chalk. She said something about runes and a star, or some such shape; he hadn't totally absorbed all of what she had described.

All they had to do was find the Soviet soldiers and lure them to the church. That would be the easiest part; the hard part would be making sure not too many people lost their lives before the ritual could be completed.



Corporal Volkoy rubbed his hands together in a vague attempt to keep the cold at bay. His men sat huddled together under thick blankets or coats. They had built a fire and were now drinking melted snow from tin cups. Some had fallen asleep and Volkoy had just started contemplating the same when an explosion shattered the silence.

A second explosion erupted, sending gouts of flame and fragments of earth, dust, and stones skywards. These showered the men in their makeshift camp, and with that they rose as one and yelled a battle cry as someone started shooting into the surrounding darkness.

Volkoy bellowed, "Wait until you have a target!"

Their unseen foes started returning fire. Someone yelled they should extinguish the fire, and someone else responded with a cry of, "It's too late for that, idiot!"

Volkoy led them out and ordered his men to fan out. Even as he spoke, a young man with short cropped red hair crumpled to the ground with a neat hole between his eyes; the back of his head was a gruesome ruin of bone and brains. They moved forward as cautiously as they could.

"There they are!" But too their bemusement, even as they spied the enemy who had clearly taken them by surprise they were falling back, not charging in.

Schroeder thought they were not going to be lured into the trap, but to his relief he saw them starting to advance. Kleitz ducked as a bullet passed dangerously close to his head. To his left, a young man cursed as a bullet slammed into his forearm, but he still managed to snap off a shot or two in response. They fell back slowly and cautiously. The Russians however, were coming forward with more determination.

More shots rang out and Schroeder saw several men ducking for cover. One man screamed as a round caught him in the right thigh. He hobbled towards cover but was picked off by a second round that caught him in the side of the neck. Another grenade sailed through the air; again it deliberately fell short of its mark, but still wounded a couple of Soviet soldiers. Slowly, steadily, they lured the Russians out of hiding.

Fleischner knelt by a makeshift altar. Two red candles burned brightly as she took a knife and drew it across the palm of her left hand, allowing the blood to flow into a copper bowl. If anyone could see her hand, they would have noticed this was not the first time she had done this to herself.

She started to chant an eerie, undulating wailing evocation. The air around her thickened as a pale, shimmering silvery-white light glowed around the boundaries of the circle she had drawn in the church.

She was on a raised platform of ground, looking down at the church. She produced a bag of sulfurous powder from her waist and added it to the bowl of blood. A cloud of sickly green smoke rose into the air. She could now see the soldiers appearing on the edge of the circle.

She noted, with satisfaction, how they took care not to erase the chalk circle. A few moments more and it would not matter anymore. Fleischner saw the advancing Russians, moving at speed, effused with bloodlust.

Schroeder's unit took cover behind pews, stone columns, and whatever else they could find. Kleitz tucked himself into the pulpit, turning it into a makeshift sniper's post.

Schroeder ignored him as he fired shots at the Russians, taking care not to spill too much blood too soon. A bullet smacked into the stonework to his right, another tore through the air above him.

Kleitz took a man through the arm, and another through the left leg. Schroeder had to begrudgingly admit the surly man was a good shot.

Both sides fiercely exchanged shots, and a vaporous shadow began to form in the air above them.

"She's here," muttered Schroeder.

To Fleischner's eyes, all that transpired in the church seemed to be moving in slow motion. She could see bullets carving their passage through the air. The sounds of battle were muffled as if obscured by filters. Grenade explosions looked like slowly blooming flowers of orange, red, and yellow. Cartridge cases fell to the ground in slowly falling cascades.

The figure became steadily more solid in the air above. Fleischner threw back her head and began to chant faster, with more passion.

"Come on you bitch!" hissed Schroeder. Was it aware of their plan? Did she suspect that this was a trap? But she materialized at last, and screaming like a banshee, fell with bloodthirsty glee upon the soldiers.

Kleitz yelled and took aim. He ignored the Soviets and fired at the female form floating above them. His bullet would have struck her in the face, but the shot seemed to lose momentum. His eyes widened in horror, as with mouth open, she flew straight towards him.

"Who mourns for Mother Russia?" it screeched. Kleitz was picked up and thrown with spine shattering force into a stone pillar.

She turned with lightning quick speed and attacked both Russian and German soldiers, apparently picking targets at random. Schroeder tried to shut out the screams of the wounded and dying, and concentrated on shooting at the shadowy figure of the woman.

She attacked with head thrown back in laughter, talons dripping with fresh blood. Schroeder felt sick as he watched

her licking the blood off her fingers, before whirling like a dervish and disemboweling a young German.

"Hurry up!" Schroeder grumbled, wondering what the hell Fleischner was doing.

Fleischner poured powder into the bowl, mixing it with hair, taken from a child, and her own blood. Another mushroom cloud of smoke rose skywards, bearing with it a foul odor. She increased the volume of her chanting and reached for one last item, which she produced from a leather pouch hanging from the belt of the robes she now wore in place of her normal uniform.

The last item was a wax effigy, crudely made and bearing no resemblance to the figure it represented. She cast her eyes upon it, and held it in the palm of her left hand. In her right hand, she held the dagger once more.

She placed the tip of the dagger over the effigy's midsection. She closed her eyes and stopped chanting. "I'm sorry," she whispered, before stabbing the effigy.

Schroeder fired another shot at the floating, wailing creature, and cursed as his rifle jammed. He dropped it and drew his Walther pistol. Holding it in both hands, he extended his arms to their full extent and fired a rapid salvo at it.

He yelled incoherently as he emptied the magazine, trying to goad the creature into attacking him alone. It wasn't working. She picked up another Russian and slammed him head first into a wall. There was a sickening crunch, and the figure slumped to the ground, leaving a hideous crimson smear in its wake.

"Whatever it is you are going to do, hurry up and do it!" he yelled to nobody in particular.

And then pain exploded in his abdomen.

The knife blade sunk deeper into the effigy as it began to bleed.

Schroeder screamed as the pain became intolerable. He collapsed to his knees and fought to catch his breath. He could no longer aim properly; his eyes were streaming with tears. Another wave of pain crashed over him and in a deluge of agony, Schroeder found himself collapsing face forwards onto the ground. Before darkness claimed him, he could have sworn he smelt his grandfather's tobacco smoke one more time.

"It's alright, Little Apple. You are coming home."

The voice was in his head, his imagination, that's what he told himself before he finally drew his last, shuddering breath.

The monstrous female whirled to face Schroeder, a strange expression on her face. She seemed to be puzzled, as her head tilted like a curious puppy. She drifted slowly towards Schroeder and hovered over his prostrate body.

She opened her mouth and emitted a loud ululating cry that sounded like the keening of a mother for a lifeless child. The noise was unbearable. All shooting had stopped as Russian and German alike observed this bizarre tableau.

They questioned what was happening, but no answers were forthcoming. Slowly, they lowered their weapons and left the battleground.

Murmuring to herself in Russian, the creature knelt down and cradled Schroeder's body in its long, thin arms. She lowered her head and kissed his forehead. With the contact of her cold lips upon his cooling flesh, she vanished, taking Schroeder with her.

Three days later, Fleischner dropped a manila envelope on the desk of her superior.

"It's over?" he asked.

"Seems to be. There's been some fierce fighting in the last couple of days with no further sightings."

He nodded and took a sip of brandy from the crystal cut glass in his left hand.

She paused before she spoke again. "Can I recommend that Schroeder gets a posthumous promotion?"

Heidenreich nodded. "That seems a reasonable request. I shall see to it personally. It's the least we can do. He was very brave"

"He might have not been so brave had he known what the banishment ritual involved. I wasn't even sure that it would work. It seems to have, but I cannot guarantee it.

"I must admit, it doesn't make sense, but the fact that he had encountered her three times and not been taken seemed relevant. It appears Baba Yaga can take a shining to someone, and spare them.

"Losing that person reminds her of the pain she felt losing her child in life. *Not* a child of Russia, but *her* child. Baba Yaga takes the soul to its final resting place where a mother can give the spirit the love that only a Mother can provide."

With that she turned briskly on her heels and left the office. Heidenreich sat back and drained his glass, silently toasting Schroeder.

Fleischner walked down the steps towards the waiting car and paused long enough to flex the fingers on the hand she cut during the ritual. She went to open the door of the car and froze.

In the reflection of the window, she saw a tall, skinny girl or woman with long flowing black hair standing on the steps of the building behind her. She spun around, her eyes widening in fear.

There was nobody there. She hastily opened the door and got into the vehicle, ordering the driver to get away from here as fast as he could. She tried to shut out the whispering voice in her head that said again and again, "Who mourns Mother Russia?"

The Mask Peddler

The wheels creak on the rough stone and a withered, feminine voice calls out, "Masks for sale! Each with gifts of its own! Come, look, and claim that which calls to you."

The cart's paint, once done up in bright colors and garish patterns, is now peeling off the brittle wood. Many varied masks hang from hooks driven into the cart, with no apparent order to their display.

An iron mask, with the eyes nailed shut, weeps tears of blood. A grinning Jester's mask, of enamel and gold gilt, promises brilliance, and madness. The last person to claim the Plague Doctor's mask died with tumor-like growths and bubonic plague. Baast's Mask and the Demon snarl at each other from opposite ends of the cart, while the Ghost and Medium's masks eerily gravitate towards each other.

The peddler is an elderly woman thick with wrinkles and wearing an impossibly largesmile. Her clothing appears to be hand-spun with brightly colored wools and fabrics sewn together in a cavalcade of color. A small monkey, Robert, runs along her cart, performing tricks and fetching things in return for cashews.

Most barely give the cart and its owner a second glance, but to some it exerts an irresistible pull, drawing them towards a particular mask. For those the masks call to, the peddler will ask for a pittance, surprising, given the unusual nature of these items.

Little is known about the peddler. Always in a hurry, she seems to simply vanish

after selling her masks. There are rumors, stories, and conjectures drawn from the tales of those who've met her, but who she is or why she sells these wares is unknown.

This gear list is a mix of items designed for PCs and NPCs; be careful which masks you allow your players to have. Unless otherwise stated, effects of the masks last only as long as they are worn.

THE JESTER'S MASK

The Jester's Mask is brightly colored in red and green enamels, and garishly lavished with gold gilt. It has a wide, mocking smile, and is attached to a Jester's cap adorned with small bells. Those who wear the Jester's Mask develop an intuitive grasp of politics and wit, but also insanity. This infection of the mind with madness often changes what would have been a considerable blessing into a dangerous curse. Wearers of the mask have been known to perform for empty auditoriums, speak only in cryptic riddles, or leap from heights, expecting to fly. The Jester's Mask was first recorded during the medieval period, often heralding regicide and a new political power. The mask cannot be removed from its wearer until this transpires, or the attempt is rendered impossible.

- Increase Smarts by 2 die types (+1 for every increase over d12).
- Increase Knowledge (Politics) by 3 die types.
- **Sharp Wit:** Charisma +2.
- Gain the Acrobat Edge.

- Gain two Quirks, and three Minor delusions, or one Minor and one Major.
- When on, the mask disappears, leaving the wearer's face decorated with the patterns of the mask, and the hat.
- The mask is removed once the regicide either occurs, or will no longer occur (*GM's call*). Once the mask is removed, all gifts and burdens that were granted by it are gone.

THE DEMON

It doesn't take much to see the sadomasochistic nature lurking under the surface of the Demon Mask. The horned brow and narrow eyes sit above a sharp-toothed grin. There is an unholy grace about this mask; the serrated horns curve into strange shapes both beautiful and threatening. Unlike some other masks, there is no mistaking what the Demon Mask demands, and offers.

- Strength +2.
- Gain a d6 in Unholy Miracles (Mask).
- **Arcane Background:** Unholy Miracles: 10PP, *damage field*, and *bolt*, trappings: flammable.
- **Vicious Horns:** Str+d6
- **Voices:** The demon whispers, cajoles, and harasses constantly. Goading towards violent and horrific acts. Refusing the voice's suggestions counts as a



“sin” for the purposes of the Arcane Background.

- **Distracted:** (-2) to Notice, may not buy the Alertness Edge. If the wearer already has the Edge, the level may be re-spent.
- When worn, the mask disappears, leaving the wearer with the mask’s horns and teeth.
- Once worn it cannot be removed until the death of its wearer, or an act of great sacrifice from the wearer.

BAAST’S MASK

The Goddess, Baast, was worshiped in Egypt as a warrior, protector, and mother. Made centuries ago, this cat-faced mask is papery to the touch, and smells faintly of spices. The inside is painted with the face of a lioness. This mask calls to a protector only after one or both of the Demon and Jester Masks are donned, and prefers female warriors and hunters.

- Increase Agility by 2 die type (+1 for every increase over d12).
- Increase Fighting, Stealth, Survival, and Tracking by 1 die type.

- **Bodyguard:** the ability to intercept attacks aimed at another within 1” with a successful Agility Check.
- Gain the Alertness Edge.
- **9 Lives:** +1 Bennie
- **Tied life-force:** You are to protect an individual, of the mask’s choosing. Should the individual you are supposed to protect die of unnatural causes, so do you. Bennies may be freely shared between you.
- When worn, the mask disappears, leaving its wearer with the jewelry decorating the mask, and the faint smell of exotic spices.
- This mask can only be removed when the Demon Mask and Jester Mask are both contained –either unworn, or on dead wearers. Once removed, the wearer retains a small blessing from Baast. The player may also choose between keeping the Bodyguard Edge described above, or choose between the Alertness, Luck, or Common Bond Edges.

TEMPTATION’S FACE

A half mask made of porcelain and accented with tasteful applications of gold leaf and pearls, which smoothly adapts its form to suit the wearer. What some accomplish through power and strength, this mask will seek through subtle seductions and casual manipulations. The Mask of the Temptress whispers words of encouragement to its wearers and guides them in interaction with others, offering the right things to say, which questions to ask, and what answers to give. It also pushes the wearer to take greater risks and fill desires better left unmet. Despite

the social graces this mask provides, it lacks the power to make its wearer immune from the consequences of his or her actions. This mask is fickle and leaves its wearer when it deems them no longer interesting; unfortunately, often when they need the mask most.

- May not be worn by those with the Cautious Hindrance, favors those with Curiosity.
- **The Right Word:** Charisma +4
- Grants the Overconfidence Hindrance, particularly in social situations.
- When worn the mask appears and disappears as appropriate; the wearer always has jewelry and ornamentation of gold inlaid with pearls.
- The Mask chooses when it will be removed.

THE IRON MASK

Forgotten after its latest appearance in the French Revolution of 1789, the Iron Mask has made its way through the years in bloodshed. The mask is a simple faceplate, blood staining the metal below its narrow eye slots. The strap is heavy leather, with an iron lock on the back. Once on, the mask grows spikes, rending flesh, blinding the eyes, and fusing with the wearer, granting incredible strength.

- Increase Strength by 4 die types (+1 for every increase over d12).
- Increase Vigor by 2 die types (+1 for every increase over d12).
- Fighting +6
- **Iron Skin:** Natural Armor 4; may stack with worn armor.
- Gain the monstrous ability: Hardy.

- Gain the Bloodthirsty and Blindness Hindrances, without the free Edge.
- When on, the mask remains visible.
- The mask cannot be removed by the wearer, and requires the correct key, or the wearer's death. Once removed, the Blindness hindrance remains, as does heavy scarring (-1 Charisma).

THE PLAGUE DOCTOR'S MASK

Plague doctors are hired during epidemics to treat the diseases other doctors will not go near. This mask originates from the time of the Black Death plague that ended in 1348, with the wearer's suicide. This mask has the long curved beak of a bird, and glass lenses through which the wearer can see, topped with the wide-brimmed hat that marks the profession. In the mask's beak is a respirator filled with strange herbs and flowers to protect the wearer from toxins, poisons, and diseases. Many have chosen this mask, hoping to heal the sick, when instead it spreads death and disease to all it touches, save its wearer. Should the mask be removed, the wearer becomes one of its victims, and its curse remains in effect.

- **Highly Infectious:** Those who come into contact with the mask or hat catch a vile and deadly illness.
- When on the mask remains visible
- The mask may be removed at any time, but the wearer is no longer immune to its effects.

MEDIUM'S GUISE

Carved from age-streaked ivory, the Medium's Guise is almost skeletal looking, with large opal eyes. When

worn, the mask opens the wearer up to the realm of the dead—all manner of dead and undead are visible, tangible, and may be communicated with. With practice, those who use this mask may seek out specific entities to interact with. However, each time the mask is used it extracts a toll from the wearer's life force, and as long as it is worn the mask calls out to all who have passed, alerting them to your location.

- The wearer may interact and communicate with the dead and undead as if they were fully corporeal.
- While worn, the mask uses the life force of the wearer to call the dead and undead to you.
- Each time the mask is put on, taken off, and for each hour of use, the wearer must make a Fatigue check. On a failure they take one level of fatigue; on a critical failure, they take one level of fatigue and a wound.
- When worn, the wearer appears to have aged, and has an ostentatious turban styled hat.
- May be removed at will.

THE GHOST

Clear, hand formed glass, this mask covers the wearer's entire face, warping it with subtle distortions in the glass. Soft colors of blues, grays, and violets cast a pale on the skin making the wearers face appear as ghostly as the mask itself. Even the peddler admits a chill runs down her skin when she touches it. Once the silken straps are fastened at the back, the wearer becomes ghost-like: invisible, intangible, inaudible. Like any true undead, this mask allows its wearer to interact with the Medium's wearer, and alerts them when the Medium's Guise is worn.

- **Incorporeal:** permanently inaudible, intangible, and invisible as per the spells of the same names.
- Feels the pull of the Medium's Guise, and knows the last location it was worn.
- To those who can see the wearer, the mask is visible as a distortion over their face
- Cannot be removed by the wearer

THE GREEN MASK

Carved from thin green wood, the mask appears to still be newly made and growing. The face's wide features seem almost as an afterthought, at odds with the abundant leaves decorating the mask. Those who choose the Green Mask are often men uncomfortable in cities and fields, preferring the forests to the company of others. Once worn, these individuals find they are no longer just at peace with the woods, but a part of them.

- **Of the Forest:** +1 to Tracking, Stealth, Notice, and Survival in the woods.
- Beast Master Edge; the animal is a minor plant elemental.
- Urban environments, tainted wildernesses, and anywhere with few plants, feel unclean and foul. The character feels unease and suffers a (-1) penalty to Notice and Charisma.
- Appears on the wearer as a collection of leaves in the hair, and, as time progresses, the leaves become more prevalent, and the wearer's skin becomes bark-like.
- This mask may not be removed.

DUNGEONLANDS

TOMB OF THE LICH-QUEEN



Old School Killer Dungeon. Savaged.



KICKSTARTER



THE ASYLUM

Nestled quietly 25 miles southwest of Rochester, New York sits the lair of a madman. It wasn't always a madman's lair; it was once a large, prominent asylum for the psychotically challenged. Some may call it a home for crazies, but the doctors who resided there considered it an opportunity to test new theories and treatment for the curing of psychosis. This was 21 years ago as the facility was shutdown in 1875 and only the echoes of its past remain.

The Asylum is a Victorian fantasy horror adventure for 4 – 6 Seasoned characters, usable within historical fantasy horror settings such as *Judgment Day*. It is based in Rochester, NY in the year 1896. If you are a player in this adventure, stop reading now to ensure your sanity is not broken. If you are the GM, continue reading and beware that you may become corrupted by the time it's finished.

BACKGROUND

The Asylum takes place in a long-abandoned medical facility in the New York countryside outside of Rochester. The medical

facility, Healthy Minds, was used to treat patients suffering from psychosis. Healthy Minds, however, was not a traditional medical facility where doctors used only known methods of treating their patients. Instead, these doctors also incorporated experimental techniques that many would consider dangerous and maddening. One doctor in particular, Dr. Bartholomew Strange, took these experiments one step further by creating his own techniques instead of using ones that have already been tested a few times elsewhere.

Dr. Strange kept charge of his own ward on the fourth floor of the facility. His doors were often kept locked and unwanted patrons were kept far away. Many doctors reported horrible screams coming from Dr. Strange's ward, but no one acted upon the reports. Healthy Minds was, after all, a facility filled with psychotic individuals and the doctors who sought to cure them; screaming was just another regular occurrence. However, if one were to spend enough time in Dr. Strange's ward, they would have realized the screams of his patients were much more terrifying than those of patients elsewhere.

Lucky for him, no one was allowed in the ward when these experiments were being performed.

Dr. Strange was what many would consider a mad scientist. His theory of curing psychosis lain within the brain physically and not just mentally. In other words, to cure the truly psychotic one must remove the psychosis from the brain. While this may seem innocent enough given the era, it was the acts of experimentation performed afterward that would give onlookers the most pause. After cutting open a patient's skull and removing part of their brain, Dr. Strange would then preserve that part of the brain and perform various experiments on it using various cadavers and "willing" volunteers (willing in that they were too drugged-up to fight the procedure). In Dr. Strange's mind, one cannot fully understand the effects of a "tainted brain" unless you put that "tainted brain" in an untainted body.

Dr. Strange had primarily kept his experimental technique quiet outside of a few trusted professionals. Upon explaining his experiment, these professionals became very distant, attempting to remove themselves from the debauchery of Dr. Strange's mind. As was common in the medical industry, doctors would not inform the greater community about undesirable practices, but would instead shun the practitioner in hopes of keeping themselves away. They may have looked down upon Dr. Strange and his theories, but they would never vocally share their thoughts. After all, they were all doctors and during that era, experiments and theories were the norm.

Dr. Strange's psychotic patients rarely lived to see the outside of Healthy Minds. They did not die from the surgery, but all became vegetative afterward. Healthy Minds could not afford to care for that many such patients and would allow them to die. However, Dr. Strange's recipients of the "tainted brain" pieces had extremely adverse side-effects. Those who were alive became psychotic killers, and those who were already dead rose to become something akin to a zombie. While transference of brain material should not cause this, Dr. Strange was more than just a medical doctor, he was also a necromancer.

Dr. Strange was fairly unfamiliar with the concepts of the occult. He was not particularly versed in the goings on of the occult, nor was he very involved in any occult activity. Instead, he came upon a book of dark mysteries in a curio shop during a visit to New York City. Using a ritual inside the book, Dr. Strange called upon a demonic force to grant him dark powers. Being unable to properly handle the powers and generally unable to perform the ritual properly, a demon appeared in the shadows and decided to humor itself. Instead of just granting Dr. Strange powers of the occult, the demon gave the twisted doctor a

taste of demonic powers in the form of near-immortality and influence over the undead.

Dr. Strange had very mild necromantic abilities, and continually studied books on the occult so he could apply dark powers to his medical studies. Despite his limited necromantic abilities, no one in the occult would possibly acknowledge Dr. Strange as a necromancer. What he didn't truly realize is that his dark powers were being transferred into his recipient patients during his experiments. Because his abilities were completely uncontrolled, Dr. Strange was unable to stop this transference of dark powers.

Unbeknownst to Dr. Strange, he was not actually the cause of this transference of power. He gained his necromantic powers from a demon who watched his experiments from the shadows. The demon was so elated by the debauchery of these patients that his enjoyment of witnessing the procedures would bleed dark energy into the recipients, causing adverse side-effects.

However, the demon was not controlled by Dr. Strange and instead wanted to revel in his misuse of these demonic powers, purely for pleasure. The demon hid in the shadows of Dr. Strange's ward and witnessed the horrid experiments that doctor conducted. Dr. Strange thought his experiments were causing the transformation from cadaver to undead servant and that the dark being granted him occult powers to sire the undead; Dr. Strange was unaware that he was dealing with a demon. While he was correct about his control over the undead, it was the demon bringing them to "life." As long as Dr. Strange performed his experiments in that ward, the demon continued animating the cadavers. After a while, the undead servants overran Healthy Minds and the facility was abandoned by all, including Dr. Strange.

After Dr. Strange fled to the country to continue his experiments, he was shocked the cadavers no longer animated. Unsure of why, but knowing this always occurred back at his ward, Dr. Strange returned to the abandoned asylum to continue his work. With the immortality he gained, he has been able to continue his work without succumbing to old age; he was 64 when the asylum was shut down. Dr. Strange still looks like he did when he first contacted the demon at the age of 60.

Dr. Strange continues his experiments, although now in the name of pleasure and not science. However, because Healthy Minds was shut down, Dr. Strange, and his demon associate, must resort to kidnapping to get new "volunteers" for his experiments.

Where do the Cadavers Come From?

Healthy Minds was open for a very long time and had no shortage of patient deaths. They have a cemetery next to the facility that is used for these patients along with anyone else who cannot afford a burial plot elsewhere (an arrangement orchestrated by Dr. Strange when the asylum was open). Because Healthy Minds was so well-known as a medical facility to treat psychosis, patients would come from all over the United States. Thus, the cemetery is well-stocked for Dr. Strange's experiments, although he will eventually run out.

OVERVIEW

After returning to Healthy Minds 17 years ago, four years after it was shut down, Dr. Strange has run out of brain pieces extracted from patients while the asylum was open. To bring in new patients, he has enlisted the help of a horde of undead minions he controls, created by the bleeding dark magic of the demon while it witnessed the experiments. Even though some of the minions don't make it back to the asylum, Dr. Strange has more than enough to replace them with. In fact, he could easily have four dozen, or at least enough to make the scenario interesting.

Due to his newfound immortality, Dr. Strange no longer needs to worry about the drawbacks of being human, such as eating and social interaction. As such, he and the demon do not leave the asylum and instead rely on the undead minions to do all the dirty work, such as kidnapping people from the surrounding region and digging up bodies in the cemetery. These kidnappings and the sight of the undead minions have made the residents in and around Rochester extremely scared, looking to the PCs for resolution.

The PCs could follow the tracks of the minions back to the asylum, fall victim to one of the kidnappings, or encounter a small horde in process of finding a new victim. Regardless of how they get to the asylum, the PCs encounter a countless number of undead minions, spirits of past Healthy Minds patients, sounds that drive terror deep into their minds, and finally Dr. Strange and his associate demon. If properly equipped, the PCs could clear the asylum and rid the land of this plague. If not properly equipped, or the scenario is the investigative type, they may find a way to banish the demon, ending Dr. Strange's ability to create new undead minions. Regardless of the PCs intervention, Dr. Strange will not complete his experiments until coming to a satisfactory conclusion, which will never happen.

Dr. Strange's near-immortality means he never ages, but he can be killed. He thinks he has immortal powers due to the occult ritual, being completely unaware that he can be wounded like any other human. As such, when confronted by the PCs, he fights with complete disregard to his health. However, he is wary of the PCs being in his lab and instead of confronting them there, he lures them outside.

Getting the PCs Involved

The Asylum is designed to be dropped into any setting based in the Victorian era or utilizing Victorian styling. It is fantasy horror and the applicable setting should have some type of emphasis on horror. If running the adventure in a setting like *Judgment Day* where the PCs are hunters of supernatural beings, they have been assigned to investigate the goings on outside of Rochester after receiving reports of mutated human sightings during the kidnappings. The goal of the team is simple: eradicate the threat at all costs.

If *The Asylum* is being placed in an investigative setting, the PCs will be assigned to investigate the sighting, in a similar fashion, but their goal should be one requiring extreme caution. Unaware of the dangers that lie ahead, the PCs may wish to monitor the asylum and find an occult spell to handle whatever beings lurk inside.

However the PCs get involved, they are completely unaware of what lies ahead. Reports from Rochester are sketchy at best and no one has prior knowledge of Dr. Strange's newfound residence within the abandoned asylum.

INVESTIGATION

There are two obvious ways to gather information regarding the reported sighting: speak to the people of Rochester or read their local newspaper, the *Democrat and Chronicle*. When speaking to the people of Rochester, good role-playing can lead the PCs to finding the information they need, otherwise have them make Streetwise rolls with a cumulative (-1) modifier for each additional piece of information they are attempting to find (to symbolize how uncommon subsequent facts are to locate). There is no time limit on the adventure, so PCs are welcome to make Streetwise rolls until they can no longer succeed. When looking through the newspaper, Investigation rolls are required with the same cumulative (-1) modifier for each piece of information they are attempting to locate. Streetwise and Investigation rolls can be Cooperative and the GM can rule that the people of Rochester become uncomfortable around the PCs as their investigation continues, fearing what horrors the PCs may uncover.

Regarding the Asylum

Healthy Minds was built in the early 1800s before electricity was available. Although there were plans to upgrade the facility to electrical lighting, this was neglected due to the abandonment of the facility. Thus the lighting inside is gas lighting, which has run out. Traversing inside the asylum must either be done during the day to allow for natural lighting or during the night with portable light sources. Otherwise the entire facility is considered Dark while windows provide Dim lighting for an area equivalent to a Medium-Burst Template centered on the window. Outside the asylum the moon and stars provide Dim lighting.

Talk to the People

If talking to the people of Rochester, or the surrounding lands, through role-playing or Streetwise rolls, the PCs may discover the following:

- Five mutated humans came into Rochester and kidnapped the local baker, a man named David Worcheski. He was forcibly removed from his bakery after closing it at 7:00 PM on Friday, March 20.
- The mutated humans moved very quickly and their speech pattern was completely indiscernible, consisting mostly of loud grunts and screams.
- The mutated humans crashed through the front window of Worcheski's Bakery to kidnap David.
- David Worcheski's bakery was the only shop on that block with the lights on.
- No one actually saw the faces of the mutated humans, but their bodies were misshapen and they moved at incredible speeds.

Newspaper Headlines

By looking through the newspaper, the PCs can find a number of headlines. These headlines assume the PCs arrive five days after the kidnapping.

- **Saturday March 21, 1896:** David Worcheski, of Worcheski's Bakery, was forcibly removed from his store shortly after closing at 7:00 PM. Witnesses say a band of thugs, dressed in tattered clothing, sprinted into town, screaming and grunting, scaring many of the locals, and broke into the bakery through the front window. The police have launched a full investigation.

- **Sunday March 22, 1896:** Robert Hutchinson, a local rancher southwest of Rochester, was found murdered outside of his home. His face was violently scratched and a large bite wound was found in his abdomen. Police fear a mountain lion may be in the area.
- **Monday March 23, 1896:** Rochester detectives have concluded that David Worcheski was kidnapped in a fashion similar to that of Katherine Laye nearly six months prior. Both were forcibly removed, although Katherine appeared to have been taken through a damaged doorway.
- **Tuesday March 24, 1896:** The Rochester police have advised that all citizens stay indoors after sunset until the culprits of the kidnapping are found.

Follow the Trail

Although it may not be obvious at first, the PCs need to travel southwest of Rochester to find the abandoned Healthy Minds asylum. Robert Hutchinson was murdered by the undead minions simply because he was in the way while they were heading back to the asylum. If the PCs do not follow this lead, they should be able to follow a track of environmental disorder as the undead minions broke bushes, farm fences, created paths in the mud, or maybe even killed a horse on their way back to the asylum. It should be relatively easy as the minions are by no means careful, but if necessary, have the PCs make a Tracking roll to spot the chaos.

After traveling 25 miles southwest, the PCs come upon the Healthy Minds asylum, with a large sign claiming as such on the edge of the property line. A frontal assault is probably not the best idea as there are dozens of undead minions mingling about outside and inside. The PCs thus have a few options for moving forward, and here are a couple ideas:

- The PCs could attempt to lure small groups of minions and dispose of them easily. If this method is chosen, two minions per PC engage in combat.
- The PCs attempt to investigate the facility better by observing the activities and traveling back to Rochester for more answers.
- The PCs could attempt to distract the minions by luring them away from the asylum to create an opening to get inside.

While these are not the only possible solutions, they are the three that this adventure expands on for simplicity's sake. If the PCs come up with other creative means of gaining access into the asylum or eradicating the undead minions, allow them to



run with their idea using the rest of the content within the adventure as guidance.

➤ **Undead Minions:** Two per PC

Minion Hordes

Dr. Strange's undead minions prefer to travel in small hordes. At the Seasoned rank, this equates to two minions per PC. At a higher rank, adjustments should be made. The minions are essentially very feral and travel like this instinctually. They can easily best a human alone, but prefer to "hunt" together to more easily overwhelm their victim. As they are undead, they do not need sustenance to survive, however they do "hunt" the surrounding lands to catch animals for sporting mutilation. Should a wary traveler happen upon the asylum, the undead minions will instead choose the human as their next prey. They prefer a victim that will give chase over one that simply lies down to die.

The PCs should have to face at least two hordes of undead minions to gain access inside the asylum. If the PCs easily overcome the minions, have the second horde arrive during combat with the first horde. Another option is to throw a third horde at the PCs, but don't make this an undead-hunting adventure as they are merely meant to slow the PCs down and act as an obstacle. The true horror is inside the asylum.

➤ **Undead Minions:** Two per PC

Asylum Investigation

Instead of simply running in to blow away the minions, the PCs may choose to further their knowledge of the asylum. If they choose this route, traversing the asylum to find Dr. Strange and his demon associate should be much easier as the PCs are familiar with the layout of the asylum; compared to if they neglected further investigation. With little more needed than the name on the sign, Healthy Minds, the PCs can travel back to Rochester to find the information they need.

Once again, there is no time limit on this investigation and a cumulative (-1) penalty should be applied to each subsequent die roll after the first. Either through role-playing, Streetwise rolls, or Investigation rolls using Rochester's newspapers or city documents, the PCs can discern the following:

- The Healthy Minds medical facility was built in 1820 as a place to treat those suffering from psychosis.
- Healthy Minds was renovated in 1865, doubling the size of the institution.
- Healthy Minds came under a horrible incursion of psychotic outbreaks and was closed in 1875.

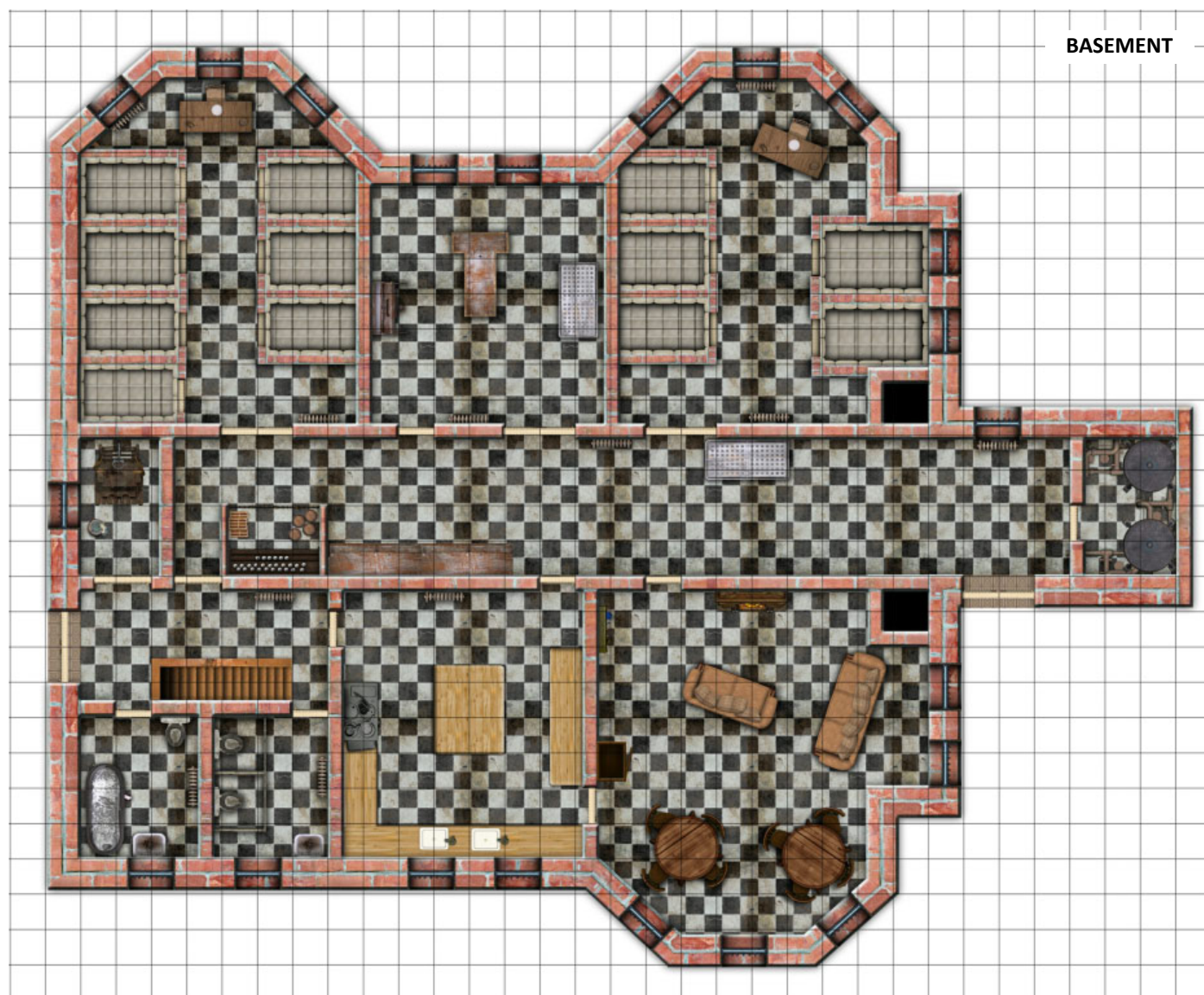
- To accommodate the many patients that died during treatment, a cemetery was built next to Healthy Minds as a final resting place for the sick.
- Dr. Bartholomew Strange commissioned the cemetery and deemed it available to those who could not afford their own burial plot.
- Healthy Minds became renowned as a place to send family members suffering from psychosis. Their revolutionary means of treatment were second to none.
- Although records show that most doctors from Healthy Minds moved away after the facility closed, there are no records of Dr. Strange's whereabouts. This information comes in the form of an article that most doctors from Healthy Minds took transfers to New York City.

Note that Dr. Strange's experiments are not documented and cannot be located through any means other than speaking to Dr. Strange or one of his long lost coworkers (who mostly refuse to speak about their time at Healthy Minds). However, Dr. Strange's former coworkers would be in their 70s or 80s.

Through their investigation of the asylum, back in Rochester, the PCs come upon some type of description of the facility. This description is mostly vague but shows there are three floors with different wards on each floor and a stairwell that connects them all. With this information, the PCs can quickly locate the stairwells once inside the asylum; otherwise they'll have to search for them.

Distraction

The PCs could create a distraction for the undead minions to draw them away from the doors of the asylum. Doing this means they will still have to be dealt with later, but possibly on the PCs' terms. Because the minions are essentially feral, they



are easily distracted by unnatural sounds (such as the sound of gunfire), possible prey (the sounds of animals in the distance), or even a display of awe (such as a PC with powers that can create an explosion in the distance).

Should a distraction be created, at least one horde of undead minions spends hours trying to find its source. At least one other horde will advance toward the distraction, hanging out near the end of the cemetery with their backs toward the asylum's front door. The PCs could thus gain passage into the asylum and because there are so many sounds within, the undead minions outside will not be a threat again until the PCs exit the asylum.

If desired, the PCs could then distract the undead minions again once they are leaving the asylum. Of course, ignoring the undead minions means they can rampage the countryside without the direction of their sire, Dr. Strange, once he is dead. The PCs would then need to address that after the adventure ends, possibly leading to another adventure. Keep in mind, the

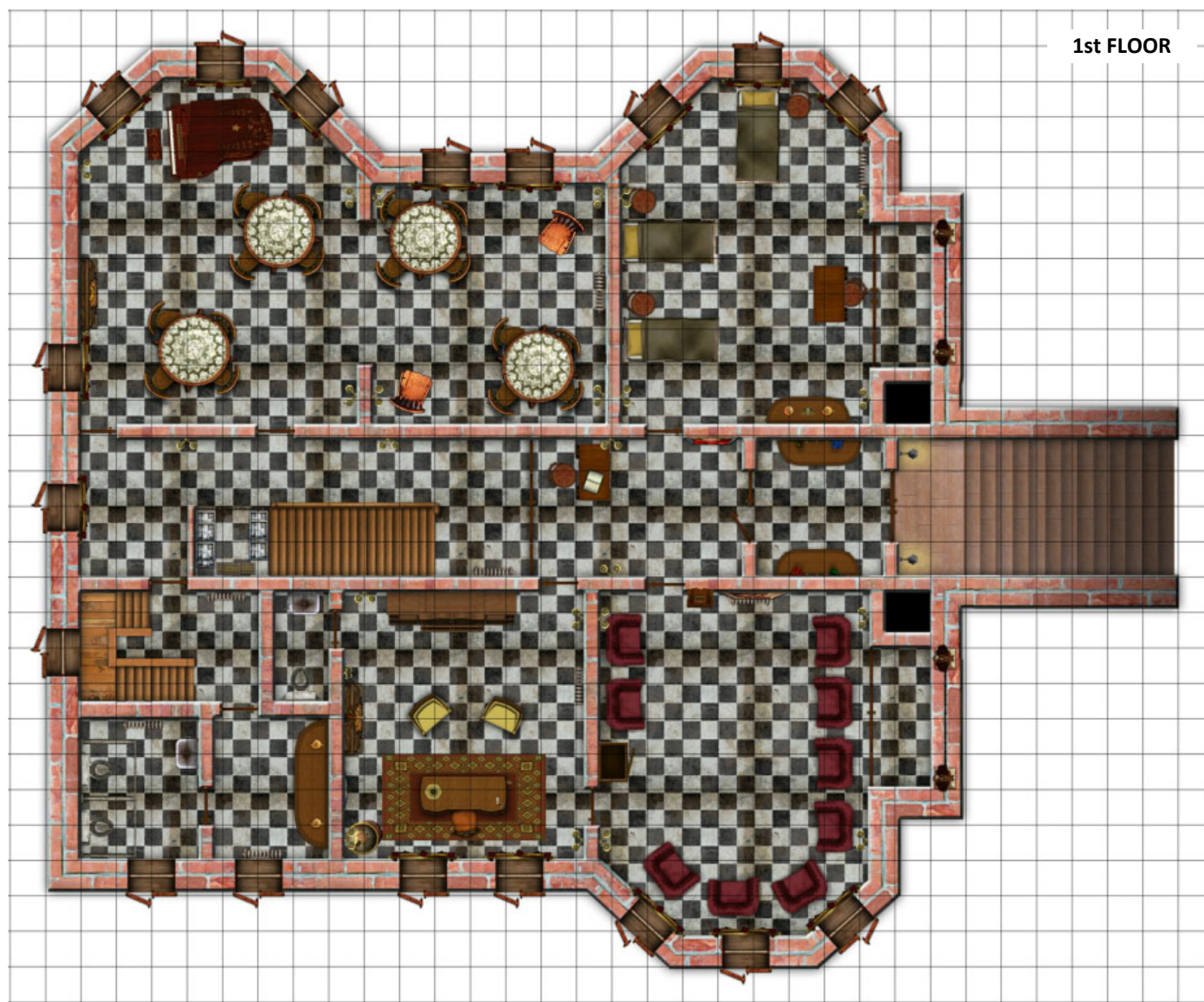
final confrontation with Dr. Strange and the demon occurs outside within the hearing range of the undead minions.

INSIDE THE ASYLUM

After the PCs are satisfied with their initial investigation, they need to enter the asylum to find the kidnapped Warcheski and confront Dr. Strange and the demon. Traversing the inside should be relatively easy, but it is filled with spirits of past patients and wandering groups of undead minions.

Either whenever it's convenient for the storyline or at an inopportune moment, the PCs happen upon some resistance. The minions inside the asylum have not grouped-up as much as the ones outside, but they are not nearly as dangerous as the psychotic spirits that haunt the asylum. Choose one of the following for random encounters throughout the asylum:

- **Undead Minions:** One per PC
- **Psychotic Patients:** One per two PCs



These encounters are meant to augment the overall storyline and provide tension inside the asylum. If the PCs become overwhelmed, have the assailants cower from the PCs and never appear again. If the adventure needs to be quicker, ignore these random encounters. If the PCs are having an easy time and want to destroy as much as possible, run the random encounters frequently. Additionally, if the PCs do not have any magical attacks to overcome the psychotic patients, they can simply travel to a different ward and the psychotic patients will not follow.

Nurse Burkhart

Eva Burkhart was a nurse at Healthy Minds during the 1850s and 1860s. Nearing her 20th anniversary, she was assigned to tending to the patients in solitary confinement, in the basement. To her, this was a mostly relaxing move as it meant she spent most of her time checking to see the patients were still alive and not having to worry so much about working with the doctors to treat their psychosis.

Nurse Burkhart came under the lustful eye of patient David Morrison, whose psychotic outbreaks always led to violence. After spending many months in treatment, Morrison was locked away in solitary confinement for two weeks to calm him down. Even though Morrison lost contact with anyone outside of Nurse Burkhart, it did not help to quell his anger and instead filled him with rage.

One afternoon, Morrison had managed to free himself of his straight jacket and pick the lock to his door prior to Nurse Burkhart checking on him. When she came upon his room, he threw the door open, slamming her against the wall in the hallway. Morrison was enraged with lust and anger, raping and killing Nurse Burkhart. Guards were quick to react, but not quick enough. They shot Morrison in the head, but not until after he had crushed Burkhart with his knees in the process of the attack.

As the PCs enter the asylum, the cacophony of the attack on Nurse Burkhart can be heard in ghostly tones. Notice checks may be required, but the sounds are trapped with the spirits of Morrison and Burkhart and can be heard as if they were faint but nearby. The PCs can easily follow the sounds to the stairwell, following it down into the basement.

Upon coming out of the stairwell and entering the hallway, the PCs witness the decrepit, ethereal bodies of Morrison and Burkhart locked in this endless struggle of mutilation. Unlike the attack when both were alive, the spirits of the two have fallen into an eternal fight where each one becomes horribly disfigured and eventually dismembered by the other. Once

Gunfire

Dr. Strange and his associate demon ignore the sounds throughout the asylum, knowing there are many trapped spirits there that do all types of crazy things. Their attention is not drawn by gunfire. However, large explosions that could potentially shake the house would be noticed, causing them to investigate.

The undead minions are not as controlled as Dr. Strange and frequently investigate any noises they hear. They are still too dumb to understand that the same spirits are making the same noises due to their eternal captivity.



CRAZY SAM

Crazy Sam is eternally trapped in the asylum until someone frees him by killing him.

Attr: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Taunt d10, Throwing d8

Armor: None

Weapons: Thrown Objects (Str+d4)

Special Abilities:

- **Ethereal:** Crazy Sam is immaterial and can only be harmed by magical attacks.
- **Fear -1:** When Crazy Sam becomes enraged, his form changes to that of a lunatic spirit, disfigured by time.

both spirits are completely mutilated, the scene fades away and returns again the following day.

Neither Morrison nor Burkhart acknowledge the PCs. They are completely oblivious to intrusions, playing out their skirmish as if they were the only two around. Witnessing this gruesome act forces a Fear -2 roll to be made as the two deface each other's bodies. Possible descriptions of the scene include: decapitation, castration, amputation, and evisceration. It is truly a horrendous site to see.

The only way this eternal skirmish will cease to appear every day is if someone uses a magical attack, aimed at Morrison's head, that causes at least one Wound. This encounter is a red herring, but if any PC discovers how to end the cycle, award them with an extra Benny for allowing Nurse Eva Burkhart to finally achieve eternal peace.

Crazy Sam

Samuel Redding was a well-known man in Rochester, New York. He served as mayor for eight years and spent his time before and after that performing various duties for the city and county.

Unfortunately, Redding was a bit hysterical at times and frequently checked himself into Healthy Minds for two- to three-day stays. He always felt better after his stays, but when he felt his mind beginning to crack, he would hurry to the asylum for his regular therapy.

Samuel Redding suffered from post-traumatic stress due to an incident that occurred when he was a young boy back in 1825. He was outside with his brother Frederick who he witnessed slipping on mud and sliding down an embankment, impaling himself on a set of large broken branches. While Redding was mostly able to shut out the memory during his youth, the scene would replay itself periodically during his adulthood. When this happened, he would become extremely stressed, suffering from anxiety, nightmares, and suicidal thoughts. He would then check himself into Healthy Minds to be free from his memory for an indefinite period of time.

When Dr. Strange had culled together a horde of undead minions and accidentally unleashed them throughout the asylum, Redding was one of the victims, and a reason why the asylum was closed.

Redding was nicknamed “Crazy Sam” due to his outbreaks. Although he was not clinically defined as crazy, should he not have sought treatment, he may have crossed that threshold. His restless spirit now haunts the first floor of Healthy Minds where short-stay patients were. He cowers from the undead minions and shouts for help whenever Dr. Strange comes near. Unfortunately for him, Dr. Strange, and his demon associate, completely ignore the spirits that haunt Healthy Minds, becoming accustomed to their presence.

When the PCs enter the first floor, Crazy Sam sees them and starts yelling for help. He has turned the nurses’ stand into his eternal home and desperately seeks a way to leave the asylum. However, Crazy Sam is only sane for brief instances and lashes out at the PCs as soon as they draw near. He is most likely seeing the PCs as part of a nightmare, or his spiritual mind has completely gone insane due to his lack of treatment.

As with the psychotic patients, Crazy Sam is confined to the area he lives in. He cannot leave the first floor and cannot enter the stairwell.

Second Floor

The second floor is one of two floors dedicated to the bulk of Healthy Minds’ purpose. This is where the patients would reside, and if full, new patients would be sent to the third floor. The second floor has thus seen no shortage of psychotic outbreaks and attempts to cure the patients with psychological and physical treatment; on the second floor, this was mostly

psychological. While there can potentially be any number of undead minions and psychotic patients on this floor, it is always ripe with ghastly sounds, smells, and spiritual scenes. In general, however, the undead minions tend to stay away from the second floor due to the psychotic serial killer Geoff Mueller.

If the GM wishes to extend the length of this scenario, the second floor is an optimal place for random encounters. Otherwise, simply continue by describing the spiritual presence on this floor without the need for combat encounters. Regardless, read or paraphrase the following once the PCs arrive at the second floor:

You have come upon the asylum’s second floor. While the first floor seemed somewhat inviting to visitors, at least when the asylum was functioning, this floor is very grim and disturbing. Very little light breaks through the windows, and upon inspection this appears to be deliberate. From the hallway (or stairwell if the PCs are still in the stairwell), you can hear a cacophony of screams, moans, clatters, and general chaos.

The second floor is filled with spirits locked in an endless loop of dealing with their psychosis. Some were victims of the undead minions when they were unleashed upon the facility, some were victims of Dr. Strange’s experiments, and others were simply unable to break their mental instability and thus were “put to sleep.”

The number of encounters on the second floor should be determined by the GM before reaching this floor. Like the undead minions, these encounters are meant to serve as a distraction along with attempting to break the minds of the PCs. If using a setting with Sanity or Corruption, this is a good place to take those mechanics into consideration.

A number of possible spiritual encounters are available on the second floor. Choose a couple for the PCs to come across, no matter where they are on this floor. Too many may get repetitious and too few may soften the tension of the scenario. If the PCs choose not to investigate the second floor, stress that there is a kidnapped victim who could possibly be on this floor (due to screams for help). Otherwise, run one of these encounters in the stairwell where the PCs stand.

Fleeing Spirit

During the madness of the undead minions’ attacks, many patients were fleeing for their lives right before they met a horrible death. They now spend their eternal lives repeating the horror they felt on that day within the hallway of the second floor.

Many panicked spirits can be seen fleeing out of their rooms and down the hallways, attempting to make it to the stairwell, a completely fruitless effort when the event occurred. Periodically, these spirits can be seen duplicating their terror-stricken sprint away from the undead minions that are no longer there. Some make it to the stairwell and can be seen falling onto the floor with large tears in their backs. Some only make it halfway down the hallway, only to have their faces torn apart. The rest failed to make it out of the rooms and are tackled to the ground and beaten to death.

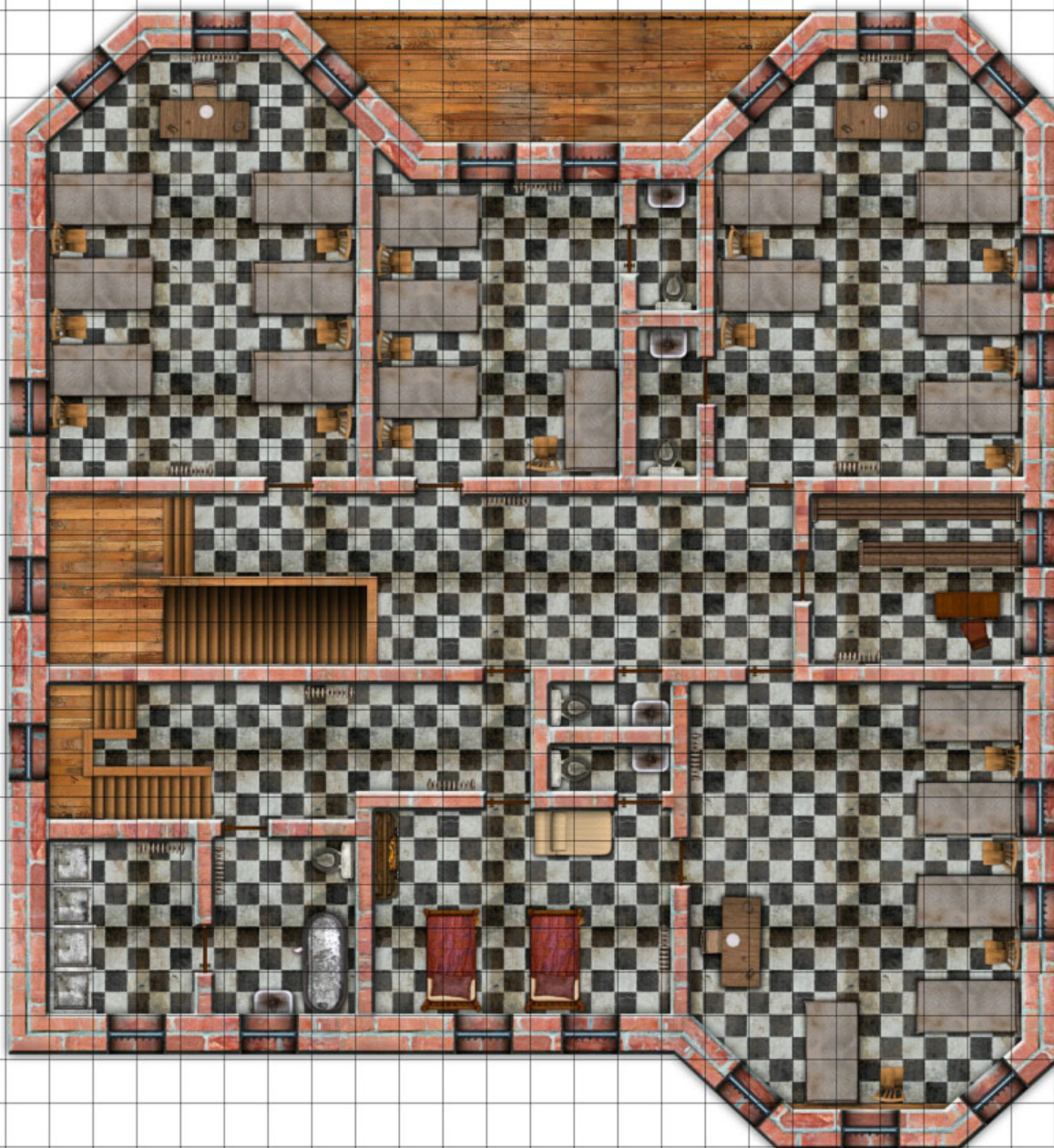
All of these scenes are horrific to witness, forcing a Fear -1 roll to be made, although only the spirits are involved. Each spirit is clearly attacked by someone or something, but whatever is

attacking them never appears as they are not a part of the spiritual replaying of the events. These spirits are eternally trapped and can only be freed once the last undead minion is killed, at which time the spirits' eternal shackles will fall away.

Favorite Nurse

The long term patients of Healthy Minds had one nurse in particular they all liked. Nurse Gretchen Williams had been working at the asylum for almost 40 years when the undead minions attacked. She was easily every patient's favorite nurse due to her extreme patience and soothing voice. Nurse Williams was well-known for her ability to calm the patients when they would wake up with night terrors.

2nd FLOOR



Unfortunately for all, Nurse Williams was working the day the undead minions attacked and became one of their victims. Although her ghost is trapped on the second floor, it is the only calm spirit around. Additionally, Nurse Williams is able to interact with the PCs. Her duty was always to see to the health of the patients and she continues her duty even as a spirit. Instead of being trapped in some endless loop of horror, her spirit still tends to the ethereal patients who now reside on the second floor.

Nurse Williams is an excellent source of information for the PCs. Although she is a ghost, her persona is one of tranquility and gives off an aura of peace. Even without powers, the PCs should be able to detect this emotionally as they draw near. She does not become startled by the PCs' presence and assumes they are new doctors working in the asylum. As the PCs get within ten feet, Nurse Williams turns her attention to them and calmly states, "You folks look like you are lost. Is there anywhere I can direct you?"

Nurse Williams can be harmed by magical attacks, although she will never fight back. If the PCs get violent, she will simply scream out "Why?!" until falling to the ground (treat her as a Wild Card). After one hour, her spirit will return with the same tranquility as before. If the PCs speak with Nurse Williams, she has many stories to tell about Healthy Minds since starting there in 1837.

If asked, Nurse Williams tells the PCs about the undead minions that attacked her and the other patients. She no longer fears them as they rarely step onto the second floor, but she fears for the solitude of the patients she cares for (even though they are spirits). She is fully aware of her ethereal state, and the state of her spiritual patients, but claims it is her eternal duty to keep these patients healthy. As long as a second floor patient's spirit remains in the asylum, Nurse Williams will continue her duties. This means her spirit will not be freed until the last spirit of her patients has been set free.

Nurse Williams describes how she has chosen to spend her eternal days within the walls of the asylum. She has a sworn duty to her patients and will not leave them behind. Her "oath" has shackled her spirit to the asylum, even though she could have been free from the beginning. If pressed further for discussion, Nurse Williams admits her choice for staying is only partly due to her sworn duty for her patients.

Nurse Williams had a son when she was 18 years old. After a short youth of only 10 years, her son went insane and was committed to Healthy Minds. Williams was already a nurse when her son was born, but as soon as he was committed, she

transferred from Rochester to Healthy Minds to care of her son and the other patients, who she then felt sorry for.

Both Nurse Williams and her son, Patrick, were killed by the undead minions. She was 66 when it happened and her son almost 48. His mind had mostly left him and Patrick was little more than a mindless drone during his days at Healthy Minds. No one figured out why he was like this, or why he would have periodic outbreaks of psychosis, but Nurse Williams was determined to never let her son out of her sight.

Nurse Williams' spirit spends most of its time caring for the spirit of her son Patrick, although the other patients are never neglected. Patrick's spirit does not interact with anyone and is essentially in an eternal vegetative state. Like many others, his spirit will not be freed until the last undead minion has been killed.

If asked about Dr. Strange, Nurse Williams knows very little. He was a reclusive man while the asylum was open and knows nothing of his current whereabouts (he never steps foot on the second floor). She has definitely heard of him and that he kept a lab on the fourth floor, deemed as private and few were ever allowed inside. Nurse Williams spent most of her time on the first and second floors with a little interaction on the third floor. She had never been to the fourth floor or the basement.

Optionally, if the PCs attack Nurse Williams, Patrick's spirit will awaken and attack the PCs. Use the same stat block as Crazy Sam's. Patrick cannot leave the second floor. If he is killed, he reappears with his mother after one hour in the same vegetative state. Neither one retains the memory of being attacked in their spiritual form.

Rowdiness

Healthy Minds' long term patients all suffer from some type of psychosis or mental instability. As such, there was always a case of rowdiness that would breakout maybe once a month, sometimes twice a month. When one patient would start to crack, another would join in on the cacophony. After seeing two patients going crazy, a whole room would quickly follow.

The discordance of patients was one thing Nurse Williams attempted to calm, but was usually only successful in keeping it from bleeding into the hallway and infecting the entire floor. Thus, in a room other than Nurse Williams' a fit of rowdy spirits breaks out. The PCs cannot see this from the stairwell and must enter the room to witness it.

The rowdy spirits are mostly oblivious to the PCs' presence, or at least they simply ignore them until being acted upon. They always remain in the room, but their rowdiness results in furniture being thrown about. The PCs can attempt to kill the

**GEOFF MUELER**

Geoff Mueller is a psychotic serial killer and a patient of Dr. Strange's that got worse after the experiment.

Attr: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d12, Stealth d12+2, Taunt d12, Throwing d10

Armor: None

Weapons: Thrown Objects (Str+d4), Splintered Wooden Dagger (Str+d4+1; AP 1)

Special Abilities:

- **Fear -2:** Geoff Mueller is the epitome of psychosis and his spirit is horribly disfigured with an aura that radiates rage and fear; a truly horrific sight to see and emotion to feel.
- **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Fleet-footed:** d10 running die instead of a d6.
- **Semi-Ethereal:** Although Geoff Mueller is mostly ethereal, his spirit is trapped in some type of in-between state due to Dr. Strange's experiment. Until engaging hand-to-hand combat with his splintered wooden dagger, Mueller is considered ethereal and can only be harmed by magical attacks. Once he moves to attack with the dagger (as soon as he gets close enough), he becomes semi-ethereal and takes half damage by all non-magical attacks along with full damage by magical attacks.

spirits using the psychotic patients' stat block, at one per PC. These rowdy spirits are generally afraid of confrontation and only engage the PCs two at a time until all are dead.

➤ **Psychotic Patients:** One per PC

If the PCs simply watch the rowdiness, they risk being hit by furniture. Roll a d6 and on a roll of 5 or 6, at least one PC has a bed frame hurled at him that does 2d6 damage. The PC is allowed an Agility roll to get out of the way and completely avoid the damage. If these spirits are killed, they do not reappear but are freed from the asylum's eternal shackles. Otherwise they are not freed until the last undead minion is killed.

Deadly Haunt

There is one horrific spirit on the second floor that haunts it constantly, so much that even the undead minions are afraid of it. This spirit is that of a serial killer named Geoff Mueller who was going through extreme therapy to "cure" him of his

homicidal tendencies. The treatment was never successful and Mueller was instead handed over to Dr. Strange for something more radical.

Dr. Strange removed what he believed was the tainted part of Mueller's brain, hopefully placating him for good. Unfortunately, Mueller was much too psychotic to be pacified with this experiment, unlike many others of Dr. Strange's patients, and instead he went completely psychotic upon returning to the second floor.

When Mueller returned to the second floor, he waited until the nurses had left the room and splintered part of a wooden drawer stand, thus acquiring a sharp weapon. He proceeded to attack the three other patients in his room by stabbing them in the throat with the wooden "dagger," killing them all. Because the others were napping, he was able to do his heinous deed without any unnecessary sounds being created. Mueller then proceeded to bathe in the blood of his victims as the nurse walked up to the door. The nurse looked inside the room and immediately locked the door, to trap Mueller inside. She ran to get two guards and allowed them access to the room.

Mueller fought hard by throwing furniture and bodies around, hoping to distract the guards long enough for him to strike. He attempted to stab one in the throat, but was caught mid-flight by a gunshot to the stomach. A second gunshot followed with a bullet to his heart. Mueller dropped the wooden dagger and fell to the floor. His spirit now haunts the second floor and is so violent that the undead minions give it whatever space it requires.

Geoff Mueller's spirit can't attack the other spirits as his attacks do nothing. He can attack material beings and has been known to kill wandering undead minions (maybe their bodies still remain in the corner). He can't leave the second floor, and if the PCs spend five minutes on the second floor, wander into the rooms opposite the stairwell, or whenever the GM deems necessary, Mueller's spirit attacks. Mueller can enter the stairwell and waits for the PCs there should they flee instead of fight him. Of course, they can always flee in a second encounter.

Third Floor

On the day the undead minions attacked the patients and employees at Healthy Minds, the third floor was all but empty with the patients either in treatment on the second floor, eating in the cafeteria on the first floor, or just out socializing. After the dust settled, only a couple employees lay dead on the third floor, but without any lingering spirits. Because of the lack of spirits on the third floor, the undead minions have turned this into their home. Although they don't necessarily sleep, this is where they spend most of their time during the day with

many spending the night here as well, although many prefer to spend their nights outside.

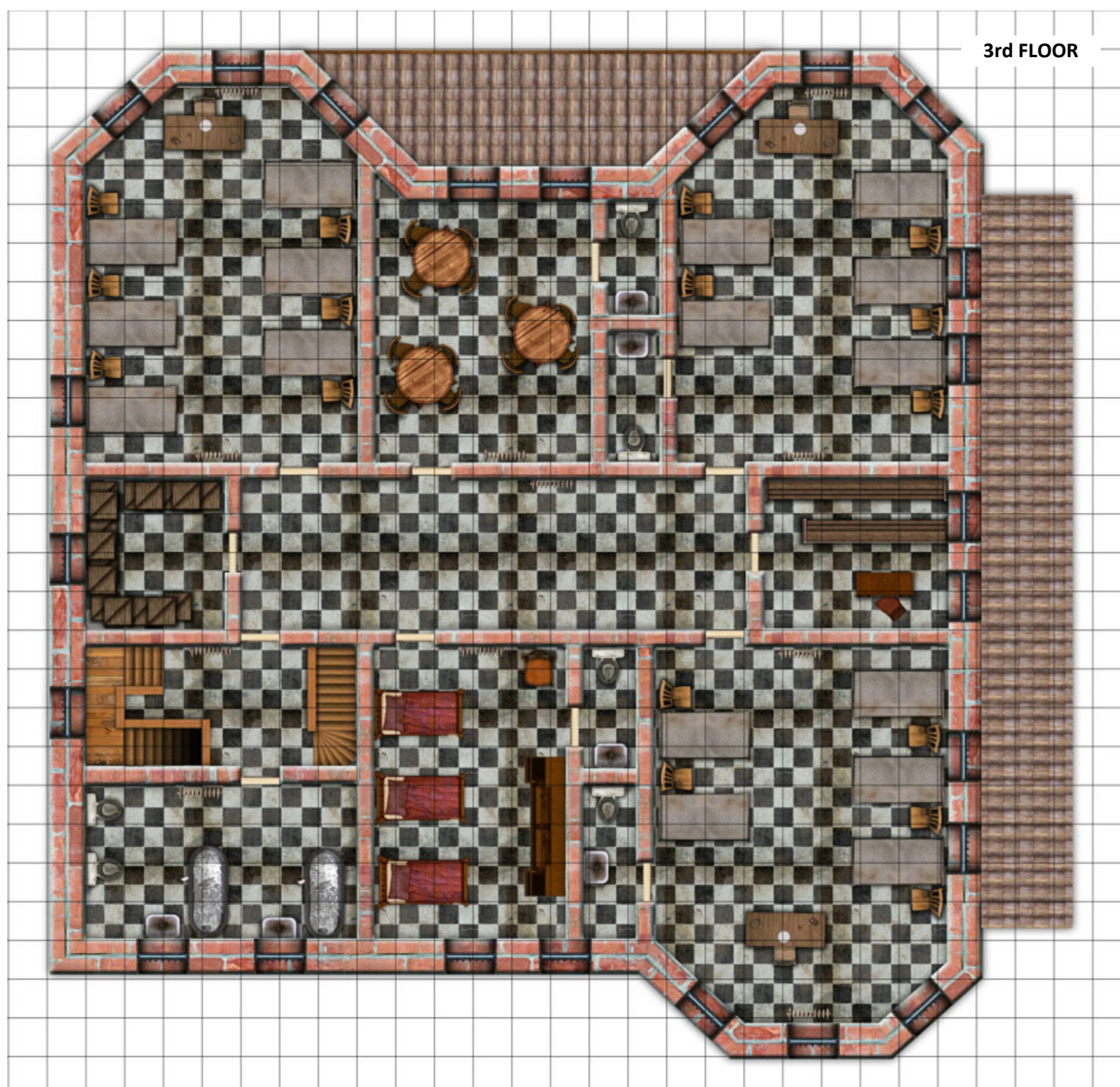
The undead minions are feral and curious, but ultimately naïve to what's going on around them. They are accustomed to the noises coming from the second floor due to the trapped spirits and thus ignore any encounters the PCs have already had. When the PCs arrive on the third floor they are spotted immediately. It is packed with undead minions.

➤ **Undead Minions:** Four per PC

It should be clear that the PCs are horribly outnumbered and can easily become overwhelmed in a direct confrontation. Unless the PCs are strong enough to face the minions head-on,

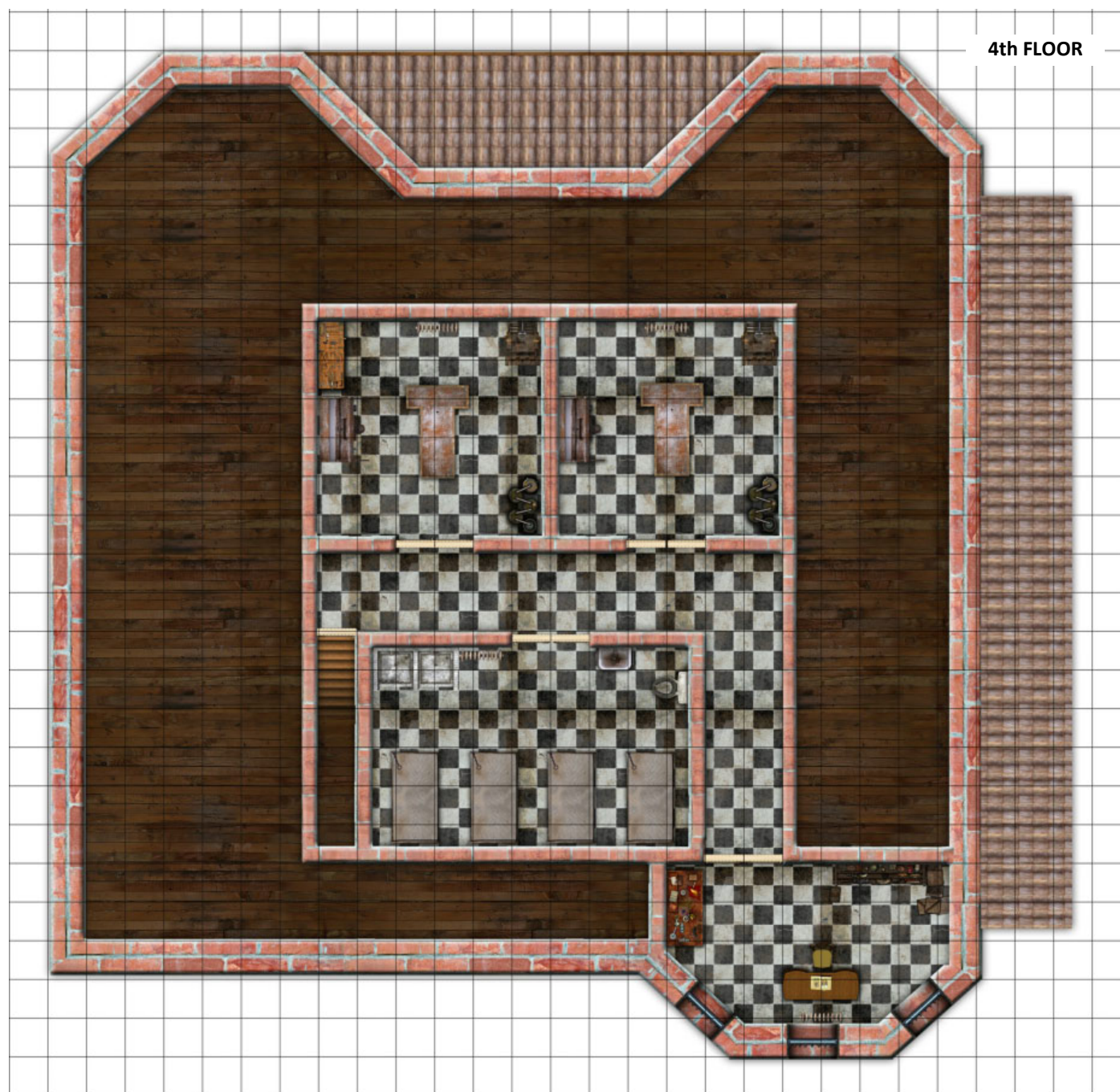
tactics have to be employed. Although a number of options exist, here are a few examples to keep the action moving:

- **Lure them to the Second Floor:** Geoff Mueller hates the undead minions and wants nothing more than to kill as many as he can. As long as there is an undead minion on the second floor, Mueller ignores the PCs. Once there are no more undead minions on the second floor, Mueller moves in to attack. If he is still alive, or if the GM decides that he reappears even after being killed, the undead minions can be easily lured down the stairwell to be taken out by Mueller. The undead minions can be lured down the stairwell simply by getting their attention and fleeing down the



stairs. Upon engaging in combat, Mueller serves as an ally until no more undead minions remain, at which time he becomes an enemy of the PCs and moves to attack them.

- Split the Horde:** If the PCs get the attention of the undead minions, a single horde moves in to attack (equal to one per PC). The PCs may then lure that horde down to a different floor and deal with them without the rest of the horde being a factor. They can do this a number of times necessary until the third floor is cleared.
- Cause a Distraction:** If the PCs have the ability to create a distraction on the far end of the third floor, at least half the horde will be too enthralled with their investigation to engage in combat until the first half of the horde is dead. This can also be done if the PCs have the ability to create a distraction outside, causing the undead minions to stare out the window while their compatriots are being taken out.
- Create an Explosion:** If the PCs can create an explosion, such as one using the Medium or Large Burst Templates, the undead minions start to panic. Instead of moving to engage the PCs, they run around aimlessly, acting as easy targets. If this is done, the



4th FLOOR



DAVID WORCHESKI

David Worcheski has been mutilated by Dr. Strange's experiments and subsequently reanimated into a violent undead creature.

Attr: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Throwing d10

Armor: None

Weapons: Bite (Str+d6), Claws (Str+d8)

Special Abilities:

- **Fear -2:** David Worcheski's mutilated body is horrific to see.
- **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Fleet-footed:** d10 running die instead of a d6.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage.

undead minions only attack once they are attacked first. However, an explosion capable of causing this mayhem alerts Dr. Strange and his associate demon, causing them to investigate.

- **Hide and Seek:** The PCs could opt to use the furniture within the various rooms on the third floor to play a game of hide and seek. If they succeed on a Stealth roll, modified by whatever furniture they are hiding behind, they may then make ranged attacks as they

please, and each undead minion has to succeed on a Notice roll before attacking a PC.

As long as the PCs do not create an explosion, they will have to travel to the fourth floor to find Dr. Strange, his associate demon, and what remains of the kidnapped David Worcheski.

Fourth Floor

The fourth floor is only about half the size of the other floors and was long ago turned into Dr. Strange's personal "domain" where he performed all his experiments and research. After returning to the asylum, Dr. Strange turned the fourth floor into his eternal "home" and primarily spends all his time here except when giving orders to the undead minions.

Dr. Strange is enthralled in his latest experiment, inside the second operating room, and only hears the PCs as they come up the stairs and into the hallway. He yells out, thinking they are an undead minion, how he has told them numerous times to stay downstairs to wait for his command. Without hearing the proper grumbling response, he looks into the hallway to see the PCs standing there.

Dr. Strange quickly jumps back into the operating room, yells out something in Latin, and a large cloud of black smoke fills the operating room. When the smoke dissipates, all that's left is David Worcheski, or what's left of him as Dr. Strange's twisted experiments have left him mutilated. Dr. Strange's associate demon has animated David Worcheski, turning him into what is essentially a revenant.





After this, the PCs must travel back through the house to encounter Dr. Strange and his associate demon in the cemetery.

CEMETERY

The cemetery outside Healthy Minds is a dismal place. Right now, it is shrouded in a black smoke as Dr. Strange stands on the edge of the obstruction being created by his associate demon. Neither one knows why the PCs are there, although they have their suspicions due to the kidnappings Dr. Strange has ordered. If the PCs are particularly curious about the cemetery, with a successful Notice roll, they find that every single burial plot has been disturbed. In fact, all but one per PC is empty (for the minor demon to summon as zombies using the standard *Savage Worlds* zombie stat block). The deceased have become part of the undead minions' army.

Dr. Strange does not move to attack as he is uncertain of the PCs' goal. If they attack first, he reciprocates. If they want to talk, he gladly discusses his lifelong experiments and how he wishes to discover a cause of psychosis and ultimately a cure. Should the PCs attempt to capture or subdue him, he attacks. If they stick with their diplomatic ways and move on, he watches until they are out of sight and goes back into the asylum.

Dr. Strange's associate demon does nothing unless Dr. Strange does first. He has nothing against the PCs and will only serve to protect Dr. Strange as they have become partners. If the PCs find a way to banish the demon, Dr. Strange moves to attack as he does not want to see his partner gone (although he is still

completely unaware that the demon is the one causing the undead to rise). The PCs could optionally find a way to sneak back into the asylum and banish the demon without Dr. Strange knowing. Once Dr. Strange becomes aware of this, he hunts down the PCs (possibly leading to a campaign nemesis) and will not stop until they are dead. However, his undead minion army fails to grow and if they are all dead, he will hunt the PCs alone.

If the PCs engage in combat, both Dr. Strange and his associate demon engage and fight to the death.



DR. STRANGE

Dr. Strange was a doctor of psychotic patients who frequently implemented experimental treatment. His interests in the occult led him to summon a demon who granted Dr. Strange very minor necromantic abilities.

Attr: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Skills: Fighting d6, Healing d10, Invocation d8, Knowledge (Occult) d6, Knowledge (Psychology) d10

Armor: None

Weapons: Dagger (Str+d4)

Special Abilities:

- **Hardy:** The magic that keeps Dr. Strange from aging also enhances his Toughness; he does not suffer a Wound for being Shaken twice.
- **Immunity:** Immune to Poison and Disease.
- **Powers:** Dr. Strange has 15 Power Points and knows the following powers with a necromantic trapping: *puppet* and *summon ally*



MINOR DEMON

Dr. Strange's demon is a lowly demon with little power in the chaos realm. It is able to grant Dr. Strange a small amount of power and has the ability to animate the dead. However, in the chaos realm, he is little more than a pion.

Attr: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10 (1)

Skills: Chaos d10, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Taunt d10

Armor: Thick skin (All 1)

Weapons: Claws (Str+d6)

Special Abilities:

- **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; only suffer half-damage from non-magical attacks except from cold iron and palladium.
- **Fear -2:** David Worcheski's mutilated body is horrific to see.
- **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Immunity:** Immune to Poison and Disease.
- **Powers:** Minor demons have 20 Power Points and know the following powers with a dark, chaotic trapping (using the Chaos arcane skill): *bolt*, *growth/shrink*, *havoc*, *obscure*, *shape change*, and *zombie*
- **Size +2:** Minor Demons are about ten ft. tall.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** Demons take full damage from cold iron weapons.
- **Weakness (Palladium):** Demons take full damage from palladium weapons.



Unless the asylum is completely emptied, the trappings of this scenario can be used in multiple ways as continued adventures or even as plot hooks for a full campaign.

WRAP-UP

If the PCs were sent to rescue David Worcheski, it should become somehow obvious that he no longer lives and was the revenant they fought in the operating room. If the player's miss it, allow the PCs a Common Knowledge roll at (-2) to figure it out. They should relay this information back to whoever "hired" them to do the investigation, or at least provide some type of follow-up so the case can be closed.

If Dr. Strange and the demon were left alive, because maybe the investigation was only to find the whereabouts of David Worcheski, another kidnapping occurs in six months. If all the undead minions were killed, the asylum no longer serves as an anchor point for the trapped spirits and all are set free. If both cases are true, Dr. Strange finds another cemetery to continue his work, building another undead minion army with the help of his associate demon.

Troubleshooting

The PCs should never be forced to perform the investigation, unless it's the focus of the scenario in consideration to how it's being run. Much of the investigation is meant to provide the PCs with the information they need to proceed through the asylum faster, anticipate what's to come, or simply provide a reference point for who they are dealing with (Dr. Strange). The PCs are welcome to wind their way through the asylum and surrounding lands without worrying about investigating.

However, if the PCs do a full investigation, they may come up with creative ways to handle the encounters without having to always resort to combat, or at least resorting to combat without allies. The focus of the scenario is to determine the whereabouts of David Worcheski and hopefully end the kidnappings. How the PCs go about doing this is pretty much up to them.

ASYLUM DENIZENS

PSYCHOTIC PATIENTS

Psychotic patients are those that died from experimental treatment while Healthy Minds was in operation. Their spirits haunt the wards they died in, attempting to break the mind of anyone who comes near.

Attr: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d12, Notice d10, Stealth d12, Throwing d10

Armor: None

Weapons: Thrown Objects (Str+d4)

Special Abilities:

- **Ethereal:** Psychotic patients are immaterial and can only be harmed by magical attacks.
- **Fear -2:** When a psychotic patient allows themselves to be seen, their deformed figures are horrific to see.
- **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.

UNDEAD MINIONS

Dr. Strange's undead minions are cadavers with "tainted" brain pieces inserted. The bleeding dark powers from his demon animate the corpses, turning them into frenzied undead.

Attr: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8

Armor: Leathery Skin (All 1)

Weapons: Claws/Bite (Str+d6)

Special Abilities:

- **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Fleet-footed:** d10 running die instead of a d6.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage.



Thule Society

What's Behind Door Number One: Secret Societies in Germany at the Turn of the 20th Century.

As the book began to close on the 19th century, Europe and the United States were on fire intellectually, spiritually, and morally. As a result, society became more and more polarized. Changes in technology, religious movements, and philosophical thought strongly contributed to this new world on fire.

The world seemed to be one big experiment as technology grew at an incredible rate, providing it with such great advances as the telephone, incandescent electric lights, and radio. However, with all of this came a dark side. Poverty was an issue, despite the rise of the middle class. Many industrial centers took advantage of this new, readily available, cheap, unskilled labor.

Drugs changed the fabric of society. While some were incredibly beneficial, such as antiseptics, others had a devastating effect on individuals and families. Morphine, heroin, opium, and other drugs were easily obtained, along with the most common drug of choice: alcohol. Alcohol and drug abuse fractured families and stressed their fragile financial resources.

Reactions to these ills took many forms. However, the most famous was the Social Gospel Movement. This was a progressive, religious movement

designed to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath and combat growing social issues. Prohibition in the United States grew out of the work of the Social Gospel Movement, as did the banning of certain activities at certain times and days that were felt to counter religious tenants. Many southern states still ban the sale of alcohol prior to noon on Sunday.

Humanistic thought was also on the rise. Although originally having religious roots, humanism eventually shed its religious skin and became a movement centered in the human experience. Philosophy replaced theology, while ethics and justice replaced religious codes of conduct for humanistic adherents.

Progressivism became firmly entrenched as a part of the political landscape during the early 20th century. This movement stressed the individual over the corporation. There was a strong feeling amongst this group that corporations had too much influence over government and were therefore responsible for the subjugation of the working class. In the United States, this group actively campaigned against child labor, for safer conditions for mine workers, and a living wage. One of the biggest victories for progressives in the US in the early 1900s was the passing of the Seventeenth Amendment, which mandated the election of Senators.

Prior to this amendment to the US Constitution, senators were chosen by the state legislatures.

This is the dirt in which the root of the secret societies of the early 20th century was planted. The old religious, scientific, and cultural norms were no longer set in stone. Self-discovery and experimentation threatened to replace religious ideology and cultural rigidity. Out of the morass of progressivism and secular humanism was born the need by some to look far beyond current religious traditions for spiritual fulfillment. They sought to attain a secret gnosis that would help them gain power and reach a level of spiritual advancement they felt was beyond the capabilities of organized religion.

This led to the birth of secret societies that dabbled in the occult, pseudo-history, and fringe religions. One of the most infamous of these secret societies was the Thule Society. Founded in Germany in 1917 by Walter Nauhaus, this group was originally named "The Study Group for German Antiquities" and had its roots in the secret society Germanenorden or Teutonic Order of the early 20th century.

Germanenorden pre-dated the Thule Society and is important because of both their emphasis on extreme nationalism and their adherence to occult practices and teachings. Most

notable is their strong anti-Semitism and a proclivity toward the teachings of pseudo-historian Madame Blavatski, who first proposed the existence of a race of supermen known as the Aryans.

As Madame Blavatski describes it, there was a superior race known as Aryans. These people originally inhabited Atlantis and possessed a vastly superior intellect with access to incredible technological advances. This was a concept that was hijacked by Guido von List, who attached a German nationalistic component to her writings. The result was the theory of the master race that resided in pure blood Germans, who List believed were the descendants of the original Aryans. It was this master race that would make Germany powerful again.

The pseudo-history and theosophist writings of both Blavatski and List might seem fanciful to most, but to some of the citizens of a post-WWI Germany, this was a ray of hope. Germany was a shell of its former self. It was no longer the powerful Prussian Empire of old. While WWI decimated a large portion of its population and resources, thousands more Germans died during the eight-month blockade by the Allied Forces from the period between the armistice and the signing of the official peace treaty with the Allies, following the end of the war. Many Germans began to think that the Germany they knew was slipping away.

Enter the Germanenorden and, later, the Thule Society. The Germanenorden was a secret society with a structure strikingly similar to Freemasonry. It had deep roots in occult and magical philosophies, as well as Aryan beliefs. This order attracted some of the top of German society, many of whom would

either simply influence Adolph Hitler or have active roles in the Third Reich.

The order's initial activities were fairly harmless. These consisted of bizarre initiation rituals, which are seen by some as quasi-masonic in nature, celebration of the solstices, study of occult and magic philosophies, and an intense grounding in Germanic purity. Occult and religious influences ranged from Runic Magic and Sufi Thought to German Mysticism.

Following WWI, this group added political assassination and intimidation to their impressive résumé. Germanenorden sought to assassinate numerous public figures within the Weimar Republic, whom they saw as having betrayed Germany. The most famous of these murders was that of the former finance minister of the Weimar Republic and one of the signatories of the armistice with the Allied Forces. They also attempted to assassinate the author of the new German republic of post-WWI.

Given their secretive nature, occult beliefs, and ultra-nationalism (colored by the concept of Aryanism), this group was seen as a dangerous, subversive organization. Hence the need arose to cloak themselves in another garment. From this need was born the Thule Society.

The Thule Society became a group within a group. Officially this group was known as a "literary-cultural group." While this was the stated focus of the group, members of the Thule Society maintained a strong focus on German racial purity, pseudo-history, and mysticism. It has been said that the inner circle of the Thule Society maintained a strong connection with



the writings of pseudo-historians like Blavatski and List. Members sought to re-connect with the lost race of intelligent beings that Blavatski described as originating in Atlantis, known as the Aryans.

Through rituals and mystic teachings, this group believed they could reconnect with this lost race and become endowed with supernatural abilities. From the power of this ancient race would be born a new race of supermen drawn from the pure German bloodline that stretched all the way back to this lost civilization.

This is not surprising given the number of Germanenorden initiates that were active in the Thule Society as founding members. It was suggested by one historian that it was very likely that no one was fooled by the thinly veiled disguise the Thule Society offered.

In 1919, members of the Thule Society, along with members of other right-wing workers groups, formed the German Workers Party. It was through this party that Adolph Hitler met several Thule

Society members, who became advisors and eventually high-ranking members of the Nazi Party. It was also this same workers party that led a failed overthrow attempt of the Weimar Republic a few years later, but ultimately triumphed and launched the Third Reich.

While history books state the Thule Society had a hand in the expulsion of the Red Army from Bavaria in the late 1910s, the crushing defeat of the attempted overthrow of the Weimar Republic by Hitler and members of the German Workers Party in an event in 1923, known as the Beer Hall Putsch, proved too much for the order. It had already suffered numerous losses at the hands of Red Army, who rounded up and killed suspected members of the order. The Thule Society continued to exist until the mid-1920s when Hitler severed ties with it, causing the order to wither away and dissolve.

In many respects, the core of the Thule Society and the Germanenorden lived on after its death as high ranking members of the Nazi Party, in particular Rudolph Hess, Deputy Fuhrer, and Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS, who were both members of the Thule Society and deeply interested in the occult.

Himmler especially was instrumental in bringing the occult into the Third Reich. Himmler, a member of the Thule Society along with Hess and Hermann Goring, adopted many occult practices and symbols as he crafted the SS. He also green-lighted numerous bizarre research projects aimed at discovering the lost knowledge of the ancients detailed in the writings of Blavatski and List.

It has been said that truth is stranger than fiction and nothing could be more evident when looking at the history of secret societies at the turn of the 20th century. Whether looking at the Thule Society in Germany or The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn in Great Britain, the most striking about these societies is their incestuous relationships with other occult and secular organizations and their ability to reinvent themselves to both hide and thrive.

So how can this add depth and enjoyment to your game? Secret societies are the monsters under the bed. They are the things that hide in the dark recesses of your attic. They are enigmas wrapped in a question mark.

From the mystery religions of Rome and Vehimic Courts of the Middle Ages to the Thule Society, a secret society can be the perfect tool to aid, oppose, or manipulate your players: just when they think they've discovered a secret society's true nature, they find that they have only seen a mirage.

The great thing about secret societies is that their membership is made up of both average citizens and those from the higher echelons of society. Each secret society has its own agenda and how it seeks to further this agenda varies. Some use assassination and intimidation while also resorting to blackmail to extort and further their goals. Many have incredible power and their reach is the stuff of legends.

The other key to understanding most secret societies is their need to discover hidden knowledge. This could be good or bad. Many have a religious quality that binds their membership and drives their efforts. This could be the search for

a lost knowledge that offers power, while others seek hidden knowledge to bring them closer to spiritual fulfillment.

Perhaps the secret society in your game is convinced that by replicating a device or ritual they discovered in the writings of a lost race will allow them to travel through time. However, what if that device or ritual simply opens a gate to an extremely hostile dimension and was the actual reason for the downfall and disappearance of that particular lost race?

What if the philosophical and theological beliefs of a secret society are at odds with the cultural norms of the country where they find themselves? To what lengths will they go to reshape the political and cultural landscape to fit their philosophical milieu?

Your party might be chased by local law enforcement only to find out that their commissioner is also a member of the secret society that hates their guts. What if your group is framed for a heinous crime by a secret society in an attempt to get them to retrieve something of value for the society? Wouldn't it be fun for them to figure out who is ruining their lives?

In the end, the way you use secret societies is only limited by your imagination. Just remember that these secret societies never really die; they only mutate, or at the very least live on in surviving members. If you want an example of just how brutal, bizarre, and calculating these groups could be, all you need to do is read history.

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COMBAT DEADLINES

In the horror genre, there is one prominent component: fear. Although it may sound simple enough to create fear, it can be difficult for a GM really put her players on edge. The mere description of frightening situations around the game table is hardly enough to concern most players. Horrific monsters and gory scenes are already staples of many non-horror RPGs and barely convince a player to play his character as though they were afraid. While *Savage Worlds* has very adequate rules to deal with fear mechanically, these rules only come into effect when the PCs finally face the monsters. However, the players can always make changes to the momentum of the storyline to avoid the horrific beast in the first place.

In reality, it's typically fear for one's safety at the root of character decisions. PCs in *Savage Worlds* walk into dangerous situations three wounds and bennies away from harm. GMs may find it difficult to put the PCs into dangerous situations

without the players feeling somehow cheated, as though the GM is working against them. Groups may thus detest facing monsters or dangers that are 'unfair' where a large statistical gap remains between the PCs and their foes or obstacles.

Presented herein is an optional mechanic to adjust the horror factor and overall deadliness of your game, which can subsequently increase the fear factor the PCs experience. By using these rules, applicable characters, Wild Cards, and Extras, PCs and NPCs, become more vulnerable to horror. Increasing the chances of mortality can produce more exciting combat situations whereas random elements, such as initiative, and tactical elements, like The Drop or Wild Attacks, make a difference. With these changes, every round of combat has the potential to be very important and frightening, not just the first round.

Deadly Attacks

By Bayden Woodland

Deadly Attacks are similar to gaining a Raise on the attack, although the extra damage applies every time, whether a Raise was achieved or not. This variation on damage also changes depending on the weapon being used. For horror settings, or horror-infused settings, this symbolizes the ability of a weapon designed to inflict damage to easily pierce a foe's skin.

When rolling damage for an attack that hits, the attacker deals an additional die of damage equal to the highest damage die of the weapon being used. These rules do not apply to inanimate objects.

For example: a young investigator, with d8 Strength wielding a d4 damage knife, attacking a zombie would deal 2d8+d4 damage. Additional damage from Acing the roll still applies, meaning a single blow can be very decisive and take the life of even a Wild Card. Another example is a Nazi officer firing his pistol on a PC from behind. Assuming he wasn't detected and had The Drop, he would deal the regular 2d6+1 damage for a pistol, an additional d6 for Deadly Attack, and +4 damage for The Drop for a total of 3d6+5 damage.

Tips for Deadliness

When using the rule listed above, combat becomes very different; it may not seem like it, but an extra die of damage can make a huge difference. For GMs looking to add an even deeper level of tactics to combat, try combining Deadliness with the optional Gritty Damage rules listed in *Savage Worlds Deluxe*.

It's important to avoid total party kills, and adventures will most likely play out differently when using the Deadliness option rule. Even a battle with a few Extras can be much more decisive. It's also important to remember that a monster with high Strength will do much more damage than before. An option to avoid this would be that only the PCs benefit from this increase to damage, as a show of heroism on the PCs' part.

As written, the PCs will be in more danger, but so too will their foes. Big boss fights can subsequently end prematurely and clever PCs may gain an advantage in combat. PCs that make use of cover, ganging up, Wild Attacks, and the Defend maneuver may benefit from these tactics much more than before. However, Deadliness can make battles shorter and harder to predict, which may accommodate a horror game appropriately.

Deadliness Options

Deadliness is an optional rule; there are many different ways a GM could tailor this rule to fit into her game. If she wanted to create rules for a glancing blow, she could rule that Deadly Attacks only function if the attacker surpassed the target number by one or more or on a Raise, ruling that merely equaling the target number is the glancing blow.

Another option is that Deadliness only applies to attacks dealt with specific weapons whereas if that weapon is unable to pierce the skin, such as a club, it cannot benefit from the additional damage. If running a game where martial arts are an important factor, unarmed attacks could be deemed as very dangerous and deal an extra die for the character's Strength.

A third option is to assign the Deadly Attack die a d4 or d6 instead of adjusting it according to the normal damage roll being made. This could also balance Wild Card creatures that have a very high Strength.

A fourth option is to only allow the extra Deadly Attack damage on a Raise, replacing the standard Raise damage bonus.

It is imperative for GMs to play around with the rules to find what fits their game. However, Deadliness is not just good for horror as it can work just as well in games where ingenuity and peaceful solutions are meant to be key. Any setting can become more dangerous by using the Deadliness optional rule, so try it out in a Savage Tale and use what works for you.

THE MINISTRY OF DECISIONS

On this particular day, Mr. Brownlow kissed his wife goodbye as usual, but didn't head off to work. He wore his normal suit and tie, put on his bowler hat, donned his shiny leather shoes, and picked up his umbrella. Instead of turning right towards Hillman-Downs and Figgis, he turned left and headed towards the local Decision Engine.

The previous evening, he had told his boss, Mr. Hillman-Downs, Jr., that he had a hospital appointment and would be absent for one day. Mr. Hillman-Downs, a kind, modern employer, told Mr. Brownlow he would only stop him a half-day's pay, and wished him well.

It was fair to say that Jeremy Brownlow was a boring man. He would even have agreed with you if you'd told him so. He'd reply, with a good-natured laugh and a nod of his head, "Yes indeed."

He was a bookkeeper's clerk. Not a bookkeeper, a job in itself both tedious and menial, but just a bookkeeper's clerk. He was thirty four years old and only one step up the ladder from general assistant. He was a full two years older than the very bookkeeper he clerked for. But something festered inside Mr. Brownlow, a fierce curiosity that just wouldn't go away. Maybe it was the boring life he led that allowed what started as a minor question to turn into such a raging obsession.

During his time off, he visited his elderly mother-in-law, or other equally dreary and bitter relatives, or sat at home listening to the radio as the gas lamps hissed and sputtered. His wife was no comfort at all. She cooked the same old meals every evening, went to

bed at sunset, and had denied him his rights as a husband for the last eight years, blaming him for her lack of pregnancy.

As he walked purposefully towards the Decision Engine, he felt a slight tingle of excitement for the first time in years, but was terrified someone would see him not going towards the hospital. He soon arrived at the huge building, its many chimneys spewing smoke and steam into the cool morning air. The queues for the individual booths were quite long at this time of the day, but he hadn't come to ask it a question, not this time.

On his previous visit, something of a monthly tradition, he and his wife had queued for some time, he remembered, but it was a pleasant day, with a light breeze. His wife had been in one of her quiet moods, which was something of a blessing, and hung onto his arm as they walked. First they visited the shop to buy a card each, one shilling for the pair, a lot on his wage. Then, as was the protocol, they separated and each entered a booth alone. Inside, there was a desk and a selection of pens and ink with which to write out your question. The booths smelled of oil and smoke and brass polish, and were strangely silent.

Mr. Brownlow had written on his card, "Should I push myself to earn a promotion, or leave the company and search for work elsewhere?" The card was then inserted into a slot on a brass fascia at one end of the booth. After a few minutes, sometimes longer, another card would appear, hopefully giving the questioner the answer they

sought, or needed. Sure enough, after a short wait, a card dropped from the same slot and into a mesh basket placed underneath.

"The labor market," it read, "is saturated with unskilled workers." Well, that was a bit rude, but Mr. Brownlow had to concede it had a point. "Those without a trade are advised to learn one, or be content with their station," it continued.

Mr. Brownlow walked from the booth, the card torn up and disposed of in the waste basket. Many thoughts went through his head as he escorted his wife back to their home, but the one that caused all the trouble came some hours later.

The radio was playing softly in the background; Mrs. Brownlow had gone to bed without a word. A single gaslight was burning, turned low to provide only enough light to exit the room. Mr. Brownlow was thinking about the answer he'd got from the Decision Engine, pondering whether he should take the advice. As if from nowhere, he suddenly thought, "How does it work?"

All night and the next day he contemplated the question. His tasks that day, indeed every day, revolved around fetching and carrying, sharpening quills, and refilling ink wells. This was something he could do in his sleep, which left time for his mind to wander. At first it was just a general question, then speculation entered the process, and his thoughts went wild.

A few days later he'd formed the opinion that there was a person inside who took your card, read it, and gave

you an answer based on their opinion. And he was satisfied with this for a while.

Then someone told him they asked a very specific question, and received a very specific answer, one personal to them. And that started him off again. No one could know in advance what questions would be asked, nor know the details of every questioner. So how did it work?

And another thing, he thought, why all the steam, why the huge building and the smoking chimneys? And what was that noise, a sort of low hum you could hear from the outside? Why did they need a warehouse sized building full of machines if it was just people writing down the answers?

And around it went; questions and theories, over and over until curiosity became preoccupation. He had to know, and the only way to find out was to go inside the Decision Engine and look. And so it came to the day when he put his plan into action.

It was no good going around the front; there was no entrance there, just a blank, red brick wall with the polished brass and glass and wrought iron booths. So he headed around the side, walking smartly and trying not to look like he was examining the building for another entrance.

The east side of the building was one continuous wall, as was the rear and west side, which brought him back around the front. This was decidedly odd, as the chimneys on the roof were clearly belching smoke and steam and who knew what else. If they were burning fuel in there, how did it get in? How did the people get in, come to that?

For a bookkeeper's clerk, the answer came surprisingly easily. Using his imagination, which he thought had died many years ago, he worked out the fuel and people were entering from one of the other sides of the six-sided warehouse. That was, from the roof, or under the floor. The roof was full of hot chimneys and in full view of any observer, so that left the floor, and some kind of tunnel.

A trip around the nearby buildings also drew a blank, until he noticed a coal wagon emerging from the lower floor of a fruit wholesaler. The wagon was empty, and the two horses had no trouble pulling it up the slope and away. Not stopping to think or look around, Mr. Brownlow headed for the still-open door and slipped inside.

The first thing he discovered was the darkness, and next that it didn't smell at all of fruit, but of smoke, coal dust, and brass polish. He was definitely in the right place. When his eyes had adjusted to the lower lighting, he followed the trail of spilt coal down a ramp and into a large cellar, filled from end to end with piles of coal. Feeling somewhat conspicuous in his attire, Mr. Brownlow continued on his quest, heading deeper into the cellar, brandishing his umbrella like a weapon.

He heard a scraping sound as he moved farther in. Rounding a pile of the black fuel, he stopped as he saw a couple of soot-covered men shoveling coal onto a spinning belt covered in metal chevrons. The device conveyed the coal upwards, to, he assumed, the machines of the very Decision Engine.

His heart was beating rapidly as he bypassed the stokers and headed for an iron ladder fixed to the wall. He'd never done anything remotely like this before. The thought of all the laws he was breaking made his heart rate increase even more, and the feeling of excitement intensified.

The rungs of the ladder were warm to the touch, and grew hotter as he ascended. The noise level also increased, until a pumping, thumping, whirring cacophony of machines in motion filled his head. He didn't know a lot about machines of course, but he wondered if the Decision Engine really needed all this power to function.

He pushed on, between the rows of gleaming, moving metal. A figure appeared between two of the machines, a dark shadow against the smoky background. Whoever it was didn't see him, so he carried on, moving in the

direction he hoped would take him to the side of the building that housed the booths and the mysterious slots.

More figures moved around in the smoke, but none approached him. Finally he had gone as far as he could, discovering a plain brick wall with a single door in it. This was it! He knew it, the final answer to his question. He reached for the door handle, his heart practically vibrating now, and opened the door, stepping through into a carpeted office.

"Ah, a visitor. Come in, Mr..?"

Brownlow closed the door behind him and took a faltering step towards the voice. The man was very tall, wide shouldered with blond hair and sparkling blue eyes. He was the most handsome man Jeremy Brownlow had ever seen, and felt sure this man's wife wouldn't deny him in the bedroom. He was seated on what Mr. Brownlow could only thought of as a throne. Despite his size, the chair was larger, almost wrapping the man in its metal embrace. A similar desk sat in front of the throne, wire baskets arranged neatly around the sides, leaving a space in the centre on which the man leaned his huge arms.

"Take a seat, please, Mr..?" The man tried again.

"Oh, er, thank you. Brownlow, Mr. Brownlow." He sat on the ordinary chair placed in front of the huge desk, perching nervously on the edge.

"Mr. Brownlow, of course. I'm sure you have many questions. Ask away, we have plenty of time."

Brownlow asked, his voice almost inaudible, "Who are you?"

"I'm sorry, I should have introduced myself. I'm the overseer, I run this place."

"The Decision Engine?"

"That's one of my duties, yes."

"How does it work?"

The overseer laughed. "A good question! Not original or surprising, but very good.

"It's quite simple really. The cards come in through the slots and get read by the Engine. It picks out key words, and selects an answer at random that

matches those words, then spits out the relevant card."

"Random? That can't be right. I spoke to people. They said you answered them very specifically."

"Ah, yes. Most of the answers just give broad advice, some more specific, and some are tailored to the individual."

"How, how do you know what to say?"

"We watch them Mr. Brownlow," he leaned into his desk adding, "We follow them and watch what they do."

"Why?"

"To maintain the illusion that the Decision Engine works, of course."

"What do you mean? Of course it works."

"And I'm glad you think so, Mr. Brownlow. That is the effect we were after."

"You mean it doesn't work?"

"Of course it does, Mr. Brownlow, you just said so."

Brownlow was very confused now. People lived their lives by the answers they got. They changed careers because the machine told them to, they had children, or didn't have children, even chose their partners this way.

"I'm sorry, I'm very confused. So it does work?"

"Do you know what a placebo is, Mr. Brownlow?"

"Yes, it's a fake pill."

"Exactly. If you give a sick man a placebo and tell him it will make him better, nine times out of ten it will make him better. At least he will believe it made him better, so what's the difference? No placebo, no cure. With the fake pill, a cure. So, the pill, fake or not, affected the outcome. This is what the Decision Engine does."

"But why?"

"Ah, another good question," he leaned back then answered, "Control, Mr. Brownlow, control."

"Control of what?"

"Have you seen the booth marked with a '1', with the silver metalwork and the plush carpet?"

"Yes, of course, it's the one the council members use."

"And that's your answer, Mr. Brownlow. Council members make decisions on what the Decision Engine tells them, and we give those answers."

"But, is that legal?"

The huge man laughed, a deep rumbling roar that echoed around the office. "Mr. Brownlow, what a product of your age you are."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand. Why have a machine at all; why not just be on the council?"

"Mr. Brownlow, if I told you to run at a man with a knife and stab him with it, would you?"

"No! Of course not!"

"If I said to you the man was a foreign soldier come to kill you and steal your land, then what?"

"Well, I'd have to defend myself and my country."

"Exactly. And that's what happens in every war. Order men to fight and they will almost certainly run away when the lead starts flying. Ask them to fight, ask them to volunteer, and they'll charge the enemy in their thousands. We learned long ago, Mr. Brownlow, that if you convince a man he has a choice, and that the choice was his, he will follow that choice to whatever end. And I'm not just talking about war here, but daily life."

"So the Decision Engine is just a way of making people do as they're told?"

"For most of the populace their daily, humdrum existence is of no consequence to the world. It matters not what they do or don't do. It's those in power we control, the so-called decision makers. But the whole scheme has to be seen to work, much like justice."

"And you need all of this machinery to move those small cards around?"

"Oh no, not at all. But this Decision Engine also makes other Decision Engines, each capable of making further copies, and so on. Soon they will cover the world. And then we can have some proper fun!"

"But what makes you think people won't find out? I'll certainly tell them."

"It would be of little consequence if you did; people would simply think you mad. But you won't be leaving here, so the matter is moot."

Mr. Brownlow leapt up and spun towards the door, only to be confronted by a monstrosity. The thing was hanging from a bar by the door, gripping the overhead racking with two long tentacles. Under this was a sack-like body, and a humanoid head at the bottom. Two arms protruded from the sides of the head, and these grabbed Mr. Brownlow in a grip of iron. He struck out with his umbrella, but the flimsy, make shift weapon had no effect at all.

"Come Mr. Brownlow, calm yourself. You came here to find out how the Engine works, and you did. You can die happy." The overseer laughed, standing with a hiss of steam. Brownlow was spun around to face the overseer, and discovered that man, throne, and desk were a single entity.

He tried to speak, but it was all too much for his stultified, middle class brain.

"Wh... wh..."

"Why? Is that what you're asking? Because we can, Mr. Brownlow; because we enjoy manipulating your species. You have so many buttons to press!" The overseer laughed loudly.

"And when there is a Decision Engine in every city in every country, when we have full control of humanity, we will start wars, create famines, build huge dynasties and tear them down. And humankind won't even suspect. You'll carry on doing it, over and over for millennia, because you think it's your own free will. Now, off you go to the furnaces, Mr. Brownlow, just like all the other inquisitive humans. Intelligence and imagination are not something we want to encourage in your kind."

Mr. Brownlow fainted, but awoke as he was thrown head first into a white hot fire, umbrella and all.

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DUST TO DUST

In this 1930s adventure, players can choose characters with any background. Some that would work particularly well would be a soldier, medical personnel, police officer, athlete, arbitrator, and academic with a biology background. Those examples provide for a variety of helpful skill sets covering the gamut of physicality, intellect, and social prowess. This is one scenario where a mix of Ranks would be reasonable should the party not be evenly matched. The party can be composed of family and friends, neighbors, complete strangers, even passersby, or a mix – whatever suits your players.

Staged Epidemic

A whole county has been isolated for a weird government experiment. The residents believe the illness has killed most of the people. In reality, it has, but some are simply paralyzed. In the end, the survivors bury some of the dead only to find out later that not all of them were dead. The *Twilight Zone* effect is that they find out that someone redirected the experiment to their own counties, so they killed their own families and friends.

The Ground on Which We Walk

The scenario takes place in a remote, rural county without any significant towns within an hour's drive in any direction from the county's border. The state and country are irrelevant, but if you want to give it a name, you can use something popular like Washington County, in the U.S. The location is one of a handful in the region that experienced a short-lived boom with dangerous factory work, courtesy of government contracts, but the work was deemed too volatile after a deadly accident, and the plants closed.

The county encompasses 500 square miles with around 15,000 residents scattered throughout. The largest concentration is near the old fertilizer plant, it being where most of the infrastructure was needed and having the closest access to anything resembling a major thoroughfare. There are 1,000 or so people there.

There is only one major road through the whole county. There are some creeks and a handful of ponds, but no rivers or lakes

running through the land. There are no sewers or public water lines, which means folks deal with septic tanks and well water.

There are only two convenience stores in the whole of the county: one smack dab in the middle and one northwest in the direction of the nearest major thoroughfare where the only true housing development, Pine Hill Estates, is (it's owned by some company, Advance Co. – if anyone recalls that). The second one is owned by the same family who runs the All-Market. Besides a few, small, volunteer fire departments, there is one medical clinic, which has limited pharmaceuticals, supplies, and equipment and is halfway between the middle convenience store and the housing development.

Ground Zero

It's been one week since the explosion at the old fertilizer plant, but it might as well have been one year. Nothing is the same. Nothing seems real. Five hundred square miles and no way out. Yet.

The party has been holed up in a house – it can belong to anybody, including one of them – for the last three days. They'd come together after being on their own for the first four days. During that time, much has happened. They saw the area fire companies collaborate to deal with the explosion and other damage, the electricity and phone lines stop working. Then there are the dead.

Those who weren't taken out by the explosion or subsequent damage seem to be either affected or unaffected; that's how the party has started thinking of the survivors. Some of those affected have gone mad. They develop hallucinations, paranoia, and a heightened state of aggression leading them to attack any person or animal around them. The party's witnessed four murders and had to help save one of the neighbors two days ago. Yesterday, Jamie, the woman who attacked Elizabeth, stopped breathing after being unconscious since the night before. They know of a few dozen deaths by accident or of an undetermined nature.

The party puzzles over why state authorities and others hadn't shown up. Firefighters initially had reports regarding toxic fumes and should standby, keeping up with the situation as best they can while experts contemplate the situation. Running out of supplies and with irrational, murderous behavior on the rise, they've gotten scared enough to flee anyway.

In Search of Safety

No matter which part of the county they head to, the party runs into a blockade. The area has been secured by armed forces. Some are dressed like soldiers, others like guards. They spot several official-looking vehicles on the border.

When they approach, the forces raise weapons at them. Once they get out of the vehicle, they'll be commanded to stay back about ten feet. Allow whatever talk is needed to lead to someone in charge, coming out having an exchange along these lines:

"We've examined some of the bodies retrieved earlier (pointing to a sealed, white tent with security surrounding it). The explosion must have released something. Researchers are trying to get it under control. Right now, we're trying to figure out what it is and how it's contracted. One of ours has already died after being exposed, and we're not exactly sure how that happened. For the time being, I'm sorry, but you have to stay where you are. We don't have the man power or facilities to transport everyone in the county. It's best to quarantine it."

If the party goes on to talk about freaked out killers, they'll be accused of blowing the situation out of proportion. However, a contingent of armed agents accompanies what looks like doctors – all in hazardous materials suits – on an expedition to retrieve some of the people, both dead and alive, but affected. The party is instructed to stay out of the way. There will be an NPC who rushes to get across the containment zone and who gets shot dead. No one moves to address the body. If the party reacts, they'll be warned that the NPC could be affected. As long as they don't try to get across the zone, the authorities won't stop them from dealing with the body. If they do, well, this scenario might end abruptly. Use the Security Enforcer stats in **NPCs Stats**. Have one of them fire a warning shot at the PCs. If that doesn't do the trick, engage in combat.

Enemy Under Cover

The authorities split off from the party in short order. On the way back, one of their front tires seems to blow. Whoever is driving has to fight for control of the vehicle. The only safe thing to do is get to the side of the road and stop. When they do, someone might roll well enough on Notice to see the tire was shot. About that time, a woman comes out from the side of the road in camouflage.

"Ya just stop right there. I know who ya are. Ya've come to get Max. He ain't goin' with ya." She takes a shot at the car's hood with her rifle then points at one of the party. *"Ain't nobody gonna go with ya if ya makes one wrong move."*

The woman is about 40, slightly heavy, and has a good aim. Sweating profusely despite it being only a little warm and having a slight breeze, she wipes her brow, lowering her weapon just a little. If anyone tries to take her, she just used her

last bullet. She doesn't stop attacking until subdued or dead. See Sally in **NPCs Stats**.

If she survives the party's defense, roll a d6. On a 1-3, she is in a coma for the next 12 hours, but is alive. On 4-6, after 12 hours, she dies. They won't know the difference unless they try to bury her more than 72 hours later and notice a change in her appearance.

If you wish, you can play this out longer to deal with Sally's family. They're in a cabin in the trees 300 feet off the road. Her cousin, Wayne, is sick and hiding in a closet, refusing to come out. Max is bound and gagged with a few bruises and a broken leg, but looks otherwise healthy.

Days on End

People are starting to get desperate. Many are afraid to approach other survivors with civility as they aren't sure if they are sane or not. They don't want to risk getting whatever seems to be going around, nor do they want to be killed because someone is experiencing delusions. As a result, everyday citizens are turning to looting. It started with easy targets like abandoned cars, but now houses are on the docket.

You can play out some of the shortages and problems the party might experience. With no electricity, there's no fresh meat. That also means refrigerators and freezers are going to be rank. Some affected are more delusional than others, being almost animal-like. The party should be on the lookout and avoid them. Otherwise, use the stats for Sally as needed for other affected NPCs.

At some point, the party's house is prime for looting. They have two floors above ground and a cellar.

The cellar has several pounds of potatoes and onions, five 5-gallon water containers, a couple of bags each of sugar and flour, and a few dozen jars of tomatoes, peppers, pickles, eggs, jam, and jelly. There is a cellar exit in case of emergencies. They'd have to climb up a rickety ladder and pop open rusted, slightly angled doors that are at the level of the ground outside to do it. It locks from the inside.

The first floor has a two dozen pillar candles of various widths. It's also well-stocked with wine and dry storage items for average cooking and baking supplies. There are two doors to outside and several windows.

The top floor hosts some nice paintings, heirloom jewelry, a fancy mirror, a small safe in the master bedroom closet (needs

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a key and contains \$20 cash, a small photo book, a marriage license, and other documents), and a pair of shotguns in a display case. There is space for two more shotguns and a pair of handguns. There's enough ammunition to hold off home invaders and to go hunting. There are several windows to the outside, two of which someone could possibly access from the covered front porch.

Out back, there's a shed that's well-equipped for preparing any deer, rabbits, or other game they might bring back.

With a successful Notice roll, someone in the party hears the noise of someone breaking in. They can try to persuade the looters to stop. It could easily turn into a fist or fire fight. This one's really quite open-ended. The PCs could turn the break-in into an opportunity to gather information and make an alliance or they can see it as an attack on their stronghold and defend it with everything they've got. See Looter for details in **NPC Stats**.

More Than Meets the Eye

By now, it's been three weeks of isolation. The party has buried at least two people who were affected. If needed, one of them thinks about history lessons regarding diseases carried due to unburied dead bodies (mostly folklore). You can run random encounters with Looters, affected, and patrols of Security Enforcers to bulk up the time spent. For even more substance, you can have the PCs have to deal with hunting, rationing water, encountering other survivors who risk conversations, and all manner of situations that could take advantage of their skills, Edges, and Hindrances. For them, civilization has ceased to exist. With bits they gather from others or see for themselves, they can start putting the pieces together.

This segment is mostly investigative. The party has probably decided that, in spite of or because of the break-in, they need to find out what other people have seen, heard, or done.

Between their own experiences and observations and what they learn from others, they'll come up with the following information:

They've been cut off from everyone the rest of the world:

- They are told they are under quarantine and the perimeter is secured with armed forces.
- Tidbits gleaned from the radio, while power lasted, indicated the world outside has only been told there was an explosion and it's believed the whole county has succumbed to the toxic mixture of chemicals; they've ordered evacuation of everything within 30 miles of the county in case the winds spread the chemicals. They think it will be completely contained

in the next week. It's being heralded as the biggest man-made tragedy the country has had in recent times.

- The explosion took out a bridge on the main road, but it's still guarded.
- Three of those affected, who were thought to be dead from the toxins, woke up after being left unburied about 96 hours after falling unconscious. (This should make them wonder how many were buried alive.)
- Something flew over the area releasing something shortly after the explosion, one was seen first by the explosion, the other was seen first by Pine Hill Estates.
- Those who were fighting the fire or at the estates were the first to go insane and die, although a few from each area beat the odds (a dozen people each).
- The people in Pine Hill Estates are all tied to the same company: Advance Co. It's a research facility 90 minutes away; none of the workers have been there since two days before the explosion – every single one of them was involved in a project and told their families and friends they'd be out of touch for an entire month.
- They find the families don't know much about the employees' actual work, but it becomes clear that the company stationed them all in the complex and they are a mix of doctors, scientists, and information technologists.

This information should be enough to get them thinking the whole thing has been some sort of set-up by Advance Co., even if their own families fell victim.

Fight for Survival

By now, the party probably put the time line together, realizing they're getting near the end of that month the Advance Co. people were to return and a tidbit on the radio about it being under control in a week now sounds ominous. They realize they need to take their chances getting out or face a nearly certain death.

They can try a head-on approach, facing the command post they first found, try to make their way out by the bridge that's out, or attempt negotiating and navigating the woods and rocks to make it to another county.

If they go the first route, they'll end up fighting the Security Enforcers, using those stats in **NPC Stats**. Advance Co. has set

up hazards across the road and on the ground nearby for such an eventuality. The party is forced out of the car.

If they go the second route, they'll need to sneak around the guards posted at the bridge by climbing down the gorge, swimming across the creek (it's deep enough that they can't wade the whole thing), and climbing up the other side before following the road or shadowing it. They'll likely get spotted by a driving patrol then, which results in a foot chase.

If they go the last route, they need to use all manner of Survival skills to deal with the woods. There's not an established hiking trail to neatly lead them out. There are dangerous animals and other creatures in the woods as well as poisonous plants. They need to take ample food, water, and related supplies, too. Meanwhile, they have to dodge the perimeter patrol.

The party's ultimate destination is up to them. They can try to find police, a hospital, a reporter, a politician, anyone they think will listen. If they make it out, they find someone.

How Could They Do This?

In the aftermath, the PCs are left with a burning question: how could they do this? The severity of the situation prompts the authorities to take some unusual measures.

A hardened-looking man about 50 with neat hair, a well-cut suit, and a no-nonsense demeanor begins a conversation with a man in his 40s dressed in a lab coat over dress clothes. His questions are general for a while, asking about the man's vocation, his working for Advance Co., and his personal life. He's prompted to ask, "What made a man like you want to bring his wife and two kids to the middle of nowhere?"

The researcher responds, "Well, it was a dream come true. Company housing, private educators, the peace and quiet of the rural land. The money couldn't be beat on top of that."

The agent looks him dead in the eye, "So what went wrong?"

The research looks surprised. "What do you mean?"

The agent leans forward, "Why did you help them do what they did when Pine Hill was right there?" The man starts to sweat, hyperventilating. The agent asks more questions, but the man falls to the ground.

In the coming weeks, the party learns that none of the Advance Co. staff knew their own community was the target. The director had it all planned.

The experiment was designed to gain them additional contracts from the government. They were testing to see how the general populace would react to a biological agent and infrastructure breakdown. The goal was to use what they

learned to create and manage a program to handle that eventuality, which the director genuinely believes will happen in the relatively near future.

Advance Co. got the staff to go along with a mix of techniques ranging from giving them a spiel about the greater good and the necessity of collateral damage, convincing them there was an imminent threat, offers of expanded research resources, and waving around good old-fashion promises of money.

However, Director Vanes wasn't satisfied that would be enough to keep them quiet long-term. He figured once they discovered their own community was dead, no one would dare come forward, either for shame of admitting to killing their own families or for fear they'd be next. He worked covertly with an Advance Co. employee who had no ties to the experiment's staff to disguise the true location data and pertinent reports. He had him go the extra step of manipulating visual evidence to look as they expected it to.

Affected Specifics

Not everyone wants to go into the details of what happens to the affected. For those of you who do, this is what you need to know.

Airplanes dumped the real agent on the county. The explosion was deadly on its own, but the chemicals had been inert for more than a year. The compound acted much like a disease in that it could be activated either by being inhaled in the concentrated air-dispersal form or by a person getting infected blood in eyes, noses, mouths, or open wounds. After an affected has shown symptoms for more than 24 hours, the blood carries no contagion.

Between 24-72 hours after exposure, unless immune, the first symptoms will show. Once the first symptoms show, the affected has 72 hours before falling into a coma. Twelve hours after that, the affected looks dead; another 24 and they either are dead or start showing signs of coming out of the coma. Those who come out of the coma make full recoveries in two weeks, although testosterone levels are permanently slightly elevated.

The symptoms progress until all are in place:

- Excessive sweating
- Hallucinations
- Erratic behavior
- Paranoia
- Fatigue

Once they reach fatigue, a coma follows shortly thereafter (mere hours). That's when their bodies start to shut down.

There was a remedy, but only enough for 20 people. After all, they didn't plan on giving it to the test subjects. They'd planned on finishing off any survivors one way or another. Any who recovered on their own were to be studied until no longer needed.

NPC STATS

SECURITY ENFORCERS

These are reasonably experienced security forces. If encountered at the main perimeter, there are eight of them. If elsewhere, they are in teams of two, up to six in a group. Give one the Marksman Edge, if needed.

Attr: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (2); **Charisma:** 0

Skills: Climbing d4, Driving d8, Fighting d8, Notice d8, Shooting d10

Armor: Leather Vest

Weapons: Assault Rifle (24/48/96; 2d8+1; RoF 3, Wt 10), Pistol (12/24/48; 2d6; RoF 1, Wt 3), Knife (Str+d4)

SALLY

Sally is about 40, average height, slightly heavy. She's wearing a plaid shirt, jeans, and hiking boots. She's affected and in the paranoia and aggressive stage.

Attr: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5; **Charisma:** 0

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d4, Notice d6, Shooting d10

Gear: Pockets full of bullets, empty back pack or laundry bag.

Weapons: Rifle (24/48/96; 2d8; RoF 1, Wt 10)

LOOTER

Looters are usually just desperate, unaffected survivors. Most are average folks. Some know how to shoot. Only apply the shooting skill if you want your looter to have a gun. Most folks come in pairs, given the danger out there, but some come alone or in a larger team. Figure two per PC for the most part.

Attr: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5; **Charisma:** 0

Skills: Driving d4, Notice d4, Shooting d4

Gear: Pockets full of bullets, small backpack with food, water, and pain medicine.

Weapons: Rifle (24/48/96; 2d8; RoF 1, Wt 10)

Hindrance: Delusional: Paranoia (Major)

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Semi-Divine

The Demigod Rank in *Suzerain*

Curtis Lyon is a line developer for Savage Mojo's "Suzerain" setting and has contributed to several "Suzerain" sourcebooks, including the ENnie Award-winning "Shanghai Vampocalypse," a campaign written specifically for Demigod Rank characters.

So what's all this about Suzerain and this 'Demigod Rank' anyway?

Suzerain has actually been around for many years in one iteration or another, although it was only formatted for the Savage Worlds engine back in 2010 (well, the beta playtest was available the prior year, but we're talking 'officially'). But from the get-go, *Suzerain* was intended to have a 'tiered' system of progression (Adventurer, Hero, Demigod) that was aptly reflected in Savage Worlds' system of Ranks.

But something was missing.

Suzerain is a setting in which the characters are agents of The Powers That Be. They may not always know it, and who or what those 'Powers' might be is less important than the ideal they serve. Characters are generally assumed to work on behalf of 'The Chosen' – those divinities that work to prevent The End Times and the destruction of the universe, while they're sometimes pitted against agents of 'The Forgotten' – those beings which seek to bring about The End Times and rewrite the universe in their own fashion.

The Legendary Rank in Savage Worlds can be pretty awesome, from both a player and a character point of view, but it doesn't *quite* capture the sheer power of a being on the verge of godhood – which is where the player characters in *Suzerain* end up.

The existing Ranks were lumped into two of the existing Suzerain tiers ('Adventurer' became covered by the Novice, Seasoned and Veteran Ranks, while 'Hero' was covered by the

Heroic and Legendary Ranks), and the final tier, *Demigod*, became a new Rank in its own right, available to characters when they hit 120 experience points.

Suzerain ramps up the characters' innate abilities a bit (starting at the Heroic Rank, for example, they get a +1 bonus to Soak damage or remove a Shaken status), and when a character hits Demigod Rank, those innate abilities are ramped up just a little further so the character 'feels' more like an entity who's approaching apotheosis. In addition to all those increased bonuses and extra Bennies ('Karma' in the *Suzerain* lingo), a Demigod gets to use a d8 for the Wild Die, for example.

In short, about the only thing that can stop a Demigod is a horde of Heroic or Legendary beasts, other Demigods, or perhaps something *more* powerful.

The idea in *Suzerain* is to allow a character to 'grow' into this semi-divine state of being.

A character starts as a Novice adventurer who only knows and understands the basic reality he's seen throughout his life, however long that's been, and (hopefully) rises up to the challenge of being a hero by averting some sort of potentially world-shattering disaster.

At this point in his life, the Heroic character now understands there's a deeper reality: times and places out of myth and imagination still exist in the Maelstrom – the place gods and other things call home. A character at this level can either stay in his home realm, becoming part of the greater mythos of his people and culture, or move to other places and other experiences. In either case, he'll (again hopefully) rise to even greater challenges until he's on the edge of being divine.

Now the character is a Demigod, and all that remains is for him to rise up into deity (either joining the pantheon of his patron deity, if any, or becoming part of the foundation for a new pantheon). And this is where *Suzerain* can truly come into its own – when the characters become Demigods.

That also leads to one of the big questions I often hear regarding *Suzerain*: What's it like to play a Demigod Rank character?

Let me see if I can put this into some perspective.

I've played in enough Savage Worlds campaigns for long enough to raise a character or two from Novice to Legendary, so I have a fair grasp of how the different Ranks 'feel' in play. I

know that Legendary characters are pretty bad ass, and can look cool while doing some awesome things.

Legendary characters got nothing on Demigod characters.

Maybe it's not the right analogy, but the closest I've ever come to feeling like I was playing a proper super hero was when I finally hit Demigod Rank with a character.

More perspective: I've been playing various Super Hero RPGs since the days of *Villains & Vigilantes* (to be fair, it was 2nd edition, but that would still be back in 1983). Since then I've tried almost every super hero RPG that's hit the market, with some systems hitting the mark better than others.

But three or so adventures into *Shanghai Vampocalypse*, I had my epiphany. My character had survived an earlier campaign, and worked his way up to his Demigod Rank. But the bad guys in this campaign had tech my character hadn't encountered before – body armor and high-tensile blades that cut through my character's armor like butter, for example – and I realized I needed fire to fight fire.

When my character grabbed the nearest nano-engineered vampire, broke its arm and took its blade, then, in the next round, proceeded to cut down two more vampires with that blade while blowing a hole through a third with his handgun, I realized my character was *better* than Legendary.

Okay... I suppose a Legendary Rank character might be able to do that sort of thing as well, but it was the *ease* in which it happened – something that made me realize just how *tough* my character had become. The hordes of genetic horrors he and his companions were facing weren't nearly such a threat to us as the mad god who was driving events along.

I realized my character was a Demigod.

He could cut through hordes of lesser beings. He could call down lightning on his foes. He could bend reality to some small degree to do his bidding.

I can't exactly speak for everyone else in the group, but I *can* note they all were eventually echoing the same sort of sentiment. These characters weren't just badass; they were badass plus an octave. If you can visualize the scene in the 2012 movie *The Avengers* when all of the Avengers were fighting off

an army of invading extra-dimensional aliens, you can visualize how the battles felt when our characters were fighting off the hordes of vampires.

Yes, it was, in fact, that awesome.

It didn't take long before every player had announced his or her character to be the Demigod of something' (For the record, mine was the Demigod of Justice, although he never found out for certain who his patron deity was. His suspicion was Astarte.)

But all this invariably leads to the next question I'm often asked: Doesn't it break the Savage Worlds engine if you use the Demigod Rank?

The short answer is, "Not that I've noticed."

First of all, things sort of balance themselves out. Sure, at Demigod Rank (and to a lesser degree, Heroic and Legendary Ranks in *Suzerain*), player characters have special abilities. But so do the NPCs and monsters, if they're equivalent in stature and ability. A Demigod in a fantasy setting isn't likely to spend much time fighting ordinary goblins; instead, he'll be fighting goblin Heroes or the Demigod of all goblins.

Second of all, things are scaled so the progression isn't sudden. You don't simply move from a Savage Worlds Legendary Rank character to having Demigod perks in *Suzerain*. More importantly, perhaps, is that those perks are, for the most part, built into the mechanics of *Suzerain*, which means a Heroic character coming out of, say, *Shadowed Earth* to start playing *Noir Knights* wouldn't suddenly find himself lacking the most basic Heroic perks.

What are those perks?

Well, I touched on them earlier, but here's a slightly more thorough (but not necessarily exhaustive) run down:

At Heroic Rank, a character gains a +1 bonus to Vigor rolls Soak damage or remove a Shaken status. This becomes +2 at Demigod Rank.

At Heroic Rank, a character starts each session with 1 additional Karma (Benny). At Demigod Rank, a character starts with two additional Karma. Similar bonuses apply to the *Suzerain Adventure Deck*, a deck of cards much like the standard Savage Worlds *Adventure Deck*, only it's designed specifically to mesh with *Suzerain*.

At Heroic Rank, a character can make a natural Healing roll every three days instead of five, and at Demigod Rank it can be made daily. Power (called 'Pulse' in *Suzerain*) also recovers more quickly at higher Ranks. For that matter, all characters have Pulse, which increases with Rank as well.

Some Edges are only available to Demigod Rank characters (as well as more that are available from Heroic Rank and onward). Additionally, some Edges and Powers scale with rank; a Demigod character can accomplish more things than a lesser being.

Demigod Rank characters use a d8 for their Wild Die and can use Karma to open Portals and bend reality. Once a character in *Suzerain* hits the Heroic Rank, he can begin hopping from realm to realm (or to various dimensions, if you prefer to think of it that way), but only with the assistance of Gates or Divinities. Once a character becomes a Demigod, those things can be done on his own.

There are also fixed' points in time and space. Each of these is called a Nexus, and a Demigod has the power to slightly warp, or flex a Nexus, temporarily changing its parameters for a brief time (about five minutes). There are potential dangers in flexing a Nexus, and it gets harder to flex them repeatedly or if they're solid and important points in the time stream, but it is a powerful tool for Demigods.

There are a few other details, but those cover the essentials.

In summary, I can say as both a designer and a player that Demigod Rank adds a whole new layer to Savage Worlds characters when playing in a setting like Suzerain without breaking the game. If you've ever had an itch to play a character like Hercules or Blade, someone who's larger than life and can do super-heroic things, Savage Worlds is a great starting point; Suzerain let's you take the leap.

If you are interested in learning more about Demigod Rank characters or *Suzerain*, you can check out Savage Mojo (www.savagemojo.com), or you can contact Curtis directly at curtis@threesagesgames.com, and he'll do his best to answer any questions you might have.

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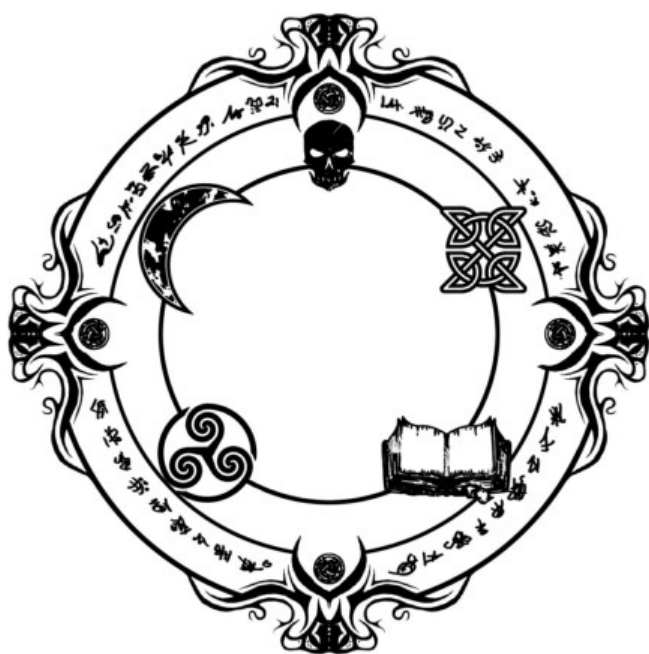
Accursed

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WITCHMARKS

In *Accursed*, player characters take on the role of beings afflicted by a witch's curse. These curses take physical form on the accursed's body as a symbol or glyph named a witchmark. Witchmarks have many common designs based on the individual witchbreed. For example, dhampirwitchmarks have many elements in common with each other, but look quite different from the witchmarks of the vargr. The individual elements that make up a witchmark represent not only the nature of the witch's curse, but also of the accursed.

The witchmark displayed in this article belongs to the accursed witchbreed known as revenants. Creations of a witch, the Morrigan, revenants are humans who enter the Morrigan's dark cauldron and maintain a strong focus on one individual ideal or desire above all others. Most commonly, this desire is focused on revenge and enables the revenant to retain their full sentience and free will when clambering out of the cauldron.



The New Moon

This symbol in the witchmark's inner ring represents the accursed's preference for subterfuge and stealth. He is skilled at moving unseen and evading detection. Some accursed have learned to use their witchmarks to sense their kin, but this witchmark is proof against such.

The Skull

The emblem of the skull ascendant represents both the death magic of the Morrigan's witchcraft and the accursed's journey through the dark cauldron from life to undeath.

The Book

The inner ring of the witchmark contains symbols of special significance to the accursed – the book means he emphasizes knowledge. Clearly this revenant values learning and intelligence over brawn and swift action. The accursed may have learned charms of witchcraft to use against the witches and their banes.

The Triskelion

The triskelion is a symbol common to the Cairn Kainen highlands of rebirth and change. Many revenants were created in or near Cairn Kainen, so it is no surprise that this accursed's witchmark bears symbols of that region.

The Kainen Knot

The kainenknot, as is obvious from its name, also originates from Cairn Kainen. Unlike the triskelion, the knot is a representation of revenge. Most commonly, the knot is used to seal a feud between clans of the highlands, but in the case of a revenant, it epitomizes the driving goal he clings to in order to maintain his sanity and free will.

Unlocking the Witchmark

A witchmark grows more baroque and complex over time as the accursed learns more about himself and the nature of his curse. In *Savage Worlds*, this is represented by going through the stages of Ranks. A Novice accursed, for example, has a rather basic witchmark that may simply involve his curse and witchbreed, while an accursed of Veteran or Heroic Rank may

have distinct representations in his witchmark for particularly significant Edges, Hindrances, or other events in his life. Whenever a player character in *Accursed* reaches a new Rank, he unlocks a new portion of his witchmark to signify his growing understanding and experience.

Some accursed have either embraced their curse completely or found a way to utterly reject it, ridding themselves of their witchmark in the process. This is a very rare turn of events in *Accursed*, but it does represent the ability for a player to take advantage of attaining a new Rank and unlocking his witchmark to change the direction of his character's nature. For example, if the player finds swordplay and firearms unfulfilling, he may choose to have his character learn witchcraft and exchange certain skills and Edges to make this happen. In-game, the character's witchmark unlocks previously-unknown abilities in the accursed, and he finds himself drawn to this new course in his life.

Using the Witchmark

As an accursed grows more familiar with his witchmark and unlocks its powers, he may find ways to harness its unique nature to his benefit. Some accursed have learned to use their witchmarks to communicate across long distances with their companions, while others have channeled power into their witchmark to sense others of their kind and even detect the presence of banes – monsters created by the same witch responsible for the accursed's monstrous state. The accursed's desire for redemption may become so strong and overwhelming that the accursed finds himself drawn to those in need by his witchmark, feeling an undefinable pull or urge to seek out regions of Morden where the might of the witches can be challenged and overcome.

Stigmata

Witchmarks take many forms, from the gold-etched cartouches common to mummies to the sewn-in scar tissue of the mongrels. No matter its nature, witchmarks are sometimes given to revealing themselves. When a witchmark is exposed to certain stimuli, including the presence of a powerful minion of the witch who created that particular accursed or when confronted with powerful witchcraft, it makes its presence known. This display is known as stigmata, and it can vary wildly in its appearance depending on the stimuli. Some witchmarks bleed freely, while others glow with a pale, disquieting radiance. Still others pulse with heat or faintly writhe, squirming beneath the accursed's skin.

What is Accursed?

Accursed is a dark fantasy setting for Savage Worlds. It is a world of perilous adventure where the forces of evil have all but triumphed.

In such a world, those who remain uncorrupted by wickedness must rely on monsters to fight against the darkness. Witches have ruled the land since the last battles of conquest, but their Grand Coven has been sundered, leaving behind remnants of a once-mighty army. The remnants of the horde include captured citizens of the conquered nations that fought as the witches' shock troops.

These are the accursed, the witchmarks burned into their flesh and souls transformed these men and women into monstrous forms. Now, unable to return to their former lives, the accursed wander the land, giving aid to those in need in an attempt to atone for past sins. Some have joined the Order of the Penitent, an organization devoted to ridding the world of witches and their evil influence. Others offer their skills as warriors, alchemists, and spies to the highest bidder. Yet others have succumbed to corruption, greed, or insanity.

Light has failed, darkness is ascendant; only those bearing the forms of monsters can stand against the tide of the witches' evil. The accursed are this world's only hope; they must learn to embrace their curse or fight against it, and find some way to forever free themselves of their witchmark.

Accursed is scheduled to launch in September of 2013.

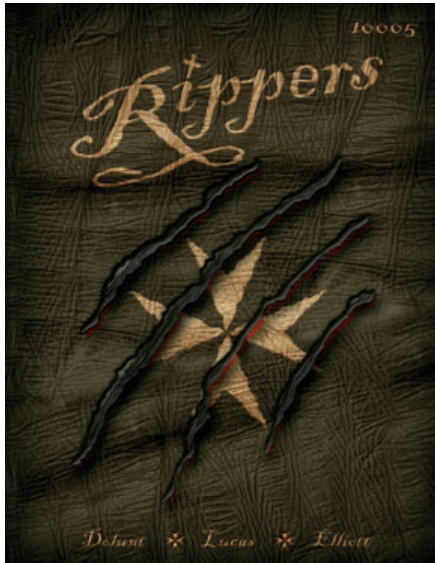
To find out more go to: www.accursedrpg.com.

THE CREATORS

The minds behind *Accursed* are Ross Watson, John Dunn, and Jason Marker. They are the creators who brought you into the grim darkness of the far future with the *Warhammer 40,000 Roleplaying* series. They are the scribes who chronicled a galaxy far, far away in *Star Wars: Edge of the Empire*. They have sharpened the cyberpunk edge where man meets magic and machine for *Shadowrun*. *Accursed* is their newest creation, a dark fantasy RPG that explores a world where faerie tales went very wrong, and to fight evil, monsters must become heroes.

BOOK REVIEWS

Book reviews are a great way of highlighting some of the products available for Savage Worlds and from its licensees. So that Savage Insider isn't the only one reviewing products, we turn to the Savage Worlds community to provide their opinions.



Rippers (Core Setting Guide)

Publisher: Pinnacle Entertainment Group

Authors: Christopher W. Doherty and Simon Lucas

Artists: Max Humber, Pawel Klopotoski, Chris Waller, Cheyenne Wright

Reviewed by Aaron T. Huss

Rippers is one of those unique settings where you have to have a desire to play it. Because it's so era and genre specific (Victorian fantasy horror), it may not be for everyone. For me, it's a setting that is extremely interesting and fills its niche nicely.

Rippers takes the concept of supernatural hunting in an interesting direction by playing off gothic horror tales placed in the Victorian era (such as Jack the Ripper) and writing with a

Victorian style. Characters are very similar to those found in the Cthulhu Mythos, although they are properly equipped to fight the horrors, which are slightly below incredibly difficult to defeat. In other words, the characters are given an opportunity to become supernatural hunters alongside the basic exploration and investigation that comes with horror role-playing (that and the insanity and psychosis).

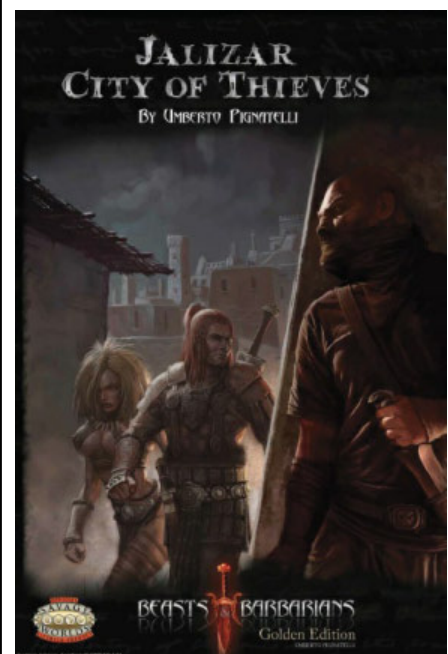
While the setting and characters are intriguing in their own ways, I feel the actual core setting guide can use significant improvements. For starters, reading through the book (keep in mind this core setting guide is fairly old in regards to *Savage Worlds*) proves a little tricky at times as the page background is very distracting, consisting of light red blood splatter that is a bit too noticeable. The formatting and layout are really nice otherwise, but the background is unfavorable.

The content of the book is another issue. While there is a boat-load of great content for the GM, the character section falls short. Everything regarding "Becoming a Ripper" looks great along with the equipment and Rippertech, but the "Setting Rules" covering *status* and *lodgings* could be significantly expanded.

My biggest concern regarding the *Rippers* setting is how *factions* are explained. There are Edges associated with being a part of a specific faction (such as Rosicrucian), but the explanation of how those factions are incorporated into the setting is only given in a couple of sentences. I didn't feel very engaged in the setting while

reading through these aspects of *Rippers*, especially since they seem to be important enough to warrant their own Edges.

Rippers is a great setting and the flavor of that setting is one that truly stands out on its own. I'm not overly impressed with the character section as I feel there are so many aspects of the setting that are not fleshed out, such as factions and a better understanding of how rippers are incorporated into the world around them (lodges, status, etc.). It's definitely a book that has a lot of great character options, an engaging plot point campaign, interesting adversaries, and loads of potential. However, I am more enthusiastic about seeing an updated version than delving into the current one.



Jalizar (Beasts & Barbarians)

Publisher: GRAMEL

Authors: Umberto Pignatelli, Andy Slack

Artists: Marta Poludnikiewicz, Magda Rudzińska, Bartłomiej Fedyczak, Anthony Cournoyer, Tomek Tworek,

Tamas Baranya, Peter Temesi, Peter Szabo Gabor, Storn Cook

Reviewed by Thomas Shook

Once again, GRAMEL has outdone themselves. *Jalizar, City of Thieves* is a great add-on to the *Beasts and Barbarians* line.

The book is broken down into several sections. The first is the Book of Lore, which covers the history of Jalizar. It is well written and provides a nice historical overview of the city and how most of the powers came into play. It also covers recent history and customs that help bring the city to life. It briefly covers the various cultures that can be found in the city and why they migrated here. Finally, it covers the technology and day to day life.

The next section covers making local residents of Jalizar. Like most *Savage Worlds* books, it has a handful of new Hindrances that fit the feel of the city; a good number of new Edges are introduced, with a few being very oriented to living in Jalizar. An optional rule for handling these city-based Edges, should a character leave on a permanent base, is presented.

Magic is the next section and expands details for Lotus Masters, Sorcerers, and Enlightened. It provides a good detail on how they interact with the city and also a few new trappings for different arcane backgrounds. There is a twist to the sorcery path, called Sewer Sorcery, along with a new backlash table.

A section on gear covers new weapons, armor, and mundane gear. Nothing

special, but good to see some localized items.

The Setting Rules section is well written and adds a bit of additional content. I particularly like the direction the author has taken on some of the more harsh Hindrances like Blind, Lame, One Arm, etc. It provides an incentive for taking these Hindrances. Most of the new rules in this section seem to deal more with thieving tasks, such as shadowing, traps, picking pockets, etc. The author did a good job of integrating the new rules with existing subsystems of *Savage Worlds*, such as dramatic tasks. The rules flow smoothly without having to worry about a new mechanic.

The Game Master section then takes up about half the book. Part of it is dedicated to the various factions of the

How do you survive in a world that wishes you dead?
Come to Dhuran and fight for everyone's survival
in a dark fantasy setting for *Savage Worlds*
brought to you by Mystical Throne Entertainment.



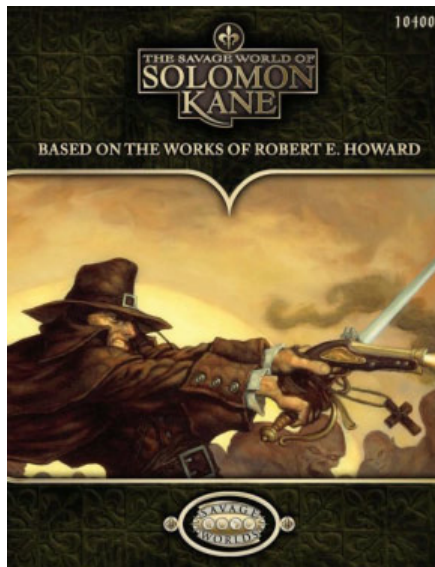
ANCIENT WORLD

BOOK REVIEWS

city, and suggestions on how to use them to make the city come alive. Included is a detailed section on the sewers and how to use them to give an urban-based campaign a chance to do a bit of dungeon crawling and exploration. There are several tables to quickly generate NPC encounters, different traps, and help for those that might be stuck.

The final part of the book is an expanded bestiary covering the denizens of the city and the sewers beneath it.

Overall the book is well written with a mix of art styles, using the standard black and white layout that GRAMEL has used for other products in this line. Though written and based in Jalizar, this book contains a wealth of usable information, for any fantasy urban campaign.



The Savage World of Solomon Kane (Core Setting Guide)

Publisher: Pinnacle Entertainment Group

Authors: Paul Wade-Williams, Shane Hensley, Randy Mosiondz, Piotr Korys

Artists: Aaron Acevedo, Alec Acevedo, Davi Blight, Niklas Brandt, Julie Dillon, Neal von Flue, Nina Garncarczyk, Diego Gisbert Llorens, Chris Malidore, Slawomir Maniak, Andreas Rocha, Daniel Rudnicki, Isaiah Sherman, Bob Stevlic, Christophe Swal, Frank Walls, Cheyenne Wright, Matt Wilson

Reviewed by Nick Clayton

The Savage World of Solomon Kane is aptly named, for Kane's world is indeed savage. It is based on the writings of Robert E. Howard and set in a dark and gritty alternate history of the late 16th and early 17th century. It was interesting and fun to take maps of the Old World and find places to pin the points of interest from Howard's writings. This world is full of evil demons and wicked men. Magic exists within this world, but the fear and prejudices of the people make it a dangerous gift to possess.

The characters, having directly or indirectly committed some mortal sin that haunts them every waking and sleeping moment, are drawn together by visions. They begin dreaming of a Shaman that speaks to them of a Puritan, of redemption, and of Torkertown. This is the beginning of the path of Solomon. Character development delves deeper into the psyche and motivations of your players' characters, having them explore the darkest depths of their characters' souls.

To better fit the setting, the system for casting spells is different from the core rules. With the dropping of Power Points, the removal of several powers, and the addition of powers straight from the source material, it provides a more

ritualized approach to casting with much more dangerous backlash for failing to properly cast a spell. Speaking of dangers, players should probably not get too attached to the pristine condition of their characters, as the potential for maiming, scarring, and death are much greater in this setting than others.

There are topics within the source material - such as slavery and racism - that may be unsettling or offensive to some players and isn't really brought up or focused on within the setting. If you, as a GM, decide to include these elements in your game, be sure to check with your players to make sure they are ok with these details. There is still more than enough savagery and grit without those elements.

This setting was released prior to the release of *Savage Worlds: Deluxe Edition*, but a new mechanic that it introduces - Interludes - would work well to enhance the gaming experience. It's beyond the scope of this review, and isn't required to enjoy the game, but it would be a nice bonus. However, the setting book includes everything needed to get started taking characters down the Path of Solomon Kane, including descriptions of key locations within the Old and New Worlds with adventure outlines in many of those locations, Adventure Generators, setting specific rules, and a bestiary.

Being a fan of Robert E. Howard, I enjoy the attention to detail and the ability to visit and expand upon places and events that took place within *The Savage World of Solomon Kane*.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Calendar of Events – July to October 2013

Descriptions are as described on event websites and were accurate as of this printing. Events with [SW] are those where Savage Worlds games are expected.

UNITED STATES

CONVERGENCE -

WWW.CONVERGENCE-CON.ORG

CONvergence is an annual convention for fans of Science Fiction and Fantasy in all media, held each July at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Bloomington, MN. We are a 4-day event with more than 5,000 attendees, and the premiere event of our kind in the upper mid-west.

Bloomington, MN
7/4-7/13

FLORIDASUPERCON -

WWW.FLORIDASUPERCON.COM

South Florida's Comic Book, Anime, Animation, Video Game, Fantasy, Sci-Fi and Pop Culture Convention is July 4-7, 2013. It's 4 days of fun featuring celebrity guests, comic book creators, voice actors, industry guests, cosplayers, artists, writers, panels, Q&A's, films & shorts, costume & cosplay contests, vendors, parties, anime, workshops, video gaming and more!

Miami, FL
7/4-7/13

KANTCON – WWW.KANTCON.COM

KantCon is a gaming convention for tabletop hobby gamers in the Kansas City area, created by tabletop hobby gamers in the Kansas City area. The only available

gaming conventions and large gatherings of gamers in the Kansas City area are limited to the beginning of the year, and the end of the year, in March and November, respectively. As most gamers are increasingly busy, in school, or have children in school, there is a void of a centralized gaming convention in the summer months in Kansas City. KantCon will fill that void with three days of tabletop fun in the form of tabletop role-playing games, card games, board games, and miniatures games.

Lenexa, KS
7/5-7/13

PAIZOCON -

HTTP://PAIZO.COM/PAIZOCON

PaizoCon returns in 2013 for 3 days of all the hot Pathfinder action you can handle, now in a new location! Gaming, panels, workshops, costumes, and loads of Pathfinder fun await you at PaizoCon 2013. Meet-up with community members from around the world, as well as Paizo staff, and dozens of hobby gaming's veteran authors, artists, publishers and designers.

Seattle, WA
7/5-7/13

CONNECTICON -

WWW.CONNECTICON.ORG

ConnectiCon is a membership-based organization, run by a very dedicated volunteer staff. ConnectiCon is New England's ONLY massively, multi-genre pop culture convention. The convention's focus is on all things pop culture and does every genre of pop culture in

as big a way as possible. The event attracts over 10,000 people to the Hartford area annually, and plans to expand to other venues in downtown Hartford.

Hartford, CT
7/12-14/13

MICHICon -

HTTP://METRODETROITGAMERS.W

ORDPRESS.COM

Since 1972, the Metro Detroit Gamers (MDG) has hosted a series of gaming conventions for the enjoyment of gamers everywhere! MDG is proud to continue this tradition by welcoming those who enjoy playing games of all stripes: wargames, board games, chess, card games, train games, naval, space and army miniatures, role-playing games and more!

Rochester, MI
7/12-13/13

FANDOMFEST -

WWW.FANDOMFEST.COM

Fandomfest is the largest Comic-Con or multi-platform convention in the Mid America region. Over 16,700 people attended in 2012 and the 2013 convention looks like it will top 20,000. We are a Comic-Con that includes Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Steampunk, Horror, Anime, Literary, Technology, Film, Gaming, Vending, Cosplay, Costuming, LARPing, Parties, KIDPALOOZA, seminars, Q and A's, Celebrities from TV, Movies and more. It's just like Comic-Con in California as far as what you will find there.

Louisville, KY
7/26-28/13

ROUNDCon -

WWW.ROUNDCON.COM

RoundCon Expo is Columbia, SC's premiere convention with three tracks of programming that include anime, creative pursuits and table-top gaming.

Columbia, SC
8/2-4/13

CHICAGO COMIC CON -

WWW.WIZARDWORLD.COM/HOME

-CH.HTML

Join tens of thousands of fans as they converge at Chicago Comic Con 2013 Wizard World Convention to celebrate the best in pop culture. Chicago Comic Con brings it all - Movies, Comics, Toys, Video Gaming, Games, TV, Horror, Wrestling, MMA, Original Art, Collectibles, Anime, Manga & More! Chicago Comic Con is brought to you by the group who produces the most widely attended Comic Con tour! This is Chicago's largest and longest-running Comic Con!

Chicago, IL
8/8-11/13

DRAGONFLIGHT -

WWW.DRAGONFLIGHT.ORG

Dragonflight is a community organization dedicated to promoting all manner of gaming from board and card games to LARP to computer games throughout the Pacific Northwest. Since 1980, Dragonflight Conventions have been a mainstay of the northwest convention scene and game community.

Seattle, WA
8/9-11/13

GEN CON - WWW.GENCON.COM**[SW]**

Featuring game industry veterans, award-winning authors and artists, jaw-dropping costumes, thousands of events, a growing Family Fun Pavilion, and the newest games on the market, Gen Con truly is The Best Four Days in Gaming™!

Indianapolis, IN
8/15-18/13

GEEK.KON - WWW.GEEKKON.NET

Geek.Kon is Madison Wisconsin's very own anime convention, sci-fi convention, and gaming convention all rolled into one! Geek.Kon is a place to celebrate all that is geeky.

Madison, WI
8/23-25/13

GUNS OF AUGUST -[HTTP://WBCONVENTIONS.ORG](http://WBCONVENTIONS.ORG)

Our goal is to host a convention that is both family friendly and appealing to a wide variety of gamers. We primarily feature historical miniature wargames, but we also showcase a board-gaming room with many of the most popular titles currently on the market, as well as science-fiction based and role playing games.

Williamsburg, VA
8/23-25/13

MECHACon -WWW.MECHACon.COM

MechaCon was conceived as a revolutionary Anime convention experience, utilizing a unique three-fold approach focusing on Japanese animation, Japanese culture, and Transformers.

New Orleans, LA
8/23-25/13

DRAGON*CON -WWW.DRAGONCON.ORG

Dragon*Con is the largest multi-media, popular culture convention focusing on science fiction and fantasy, gaming, comics, literature, art, music, and film in the universe!

Altanta, GA
8/30-9/2/13

GATEWAY -WWW.STRATEGICON.NET

Our conventions offer the chance to play, watch and buy a variety of board games, card games, miniatures, roleplaying, collectables, and computer games.

Los Angeles, CA
8/30-9/2/13

MAGE Con South -WWW.MAGE-PAGE.COM

In honor of the 30th Anniversary this year's convention admission is FREE! Great games, contests, miniatures, costumes, seminars, artwork, and special guests.

Sioux City, IA
8/30-9/2/13

PAX PRIME -[HTTP://PRIME.PAXSITE.COM](http://PRIME.PAXSITE.COM)

In 2004, the folks at Penny Arcade decided they wanted a show exclusively for gaming. From that idea spawned an event focused on the culture and community that is gaming.

Seattle, WA
8/30-9/2/13

QUEEN CITY CONQUEST -WWW.QUEENCITYCONQUEST.COM**[SW]**

We welcome all types of gaming, including Role Playing Games, War Games, Board Games, Collectible Card Games, and more.

Buffalo, NY
8/30-9/1/13

TACTICON -[HTTP://DENVERGAMERS.ORG](http://DENVERGAMERS.ORG)**[SW]**

The Denver Gamers Association is a non-profit organization which promotes and supports table-top gaming of all kinds.

Denver, CO
8/30-9/3/12

OHIO COMIC CON -WWW.WIZARDWORLD.COM/WIZCON.HTML

Join tens of thousands of fellow fans as they converge at the Greater Columbus Convention Center at Ohio Comic Con to celebrate the best in pop culture.

Columbus' Comic Con brings it all - Movies, Comics, Toys, Video Gaming, Games, TV, Graphic Novels, Horror, Wrestling, MMA, Original Art, Collectibles, Anime, Manga, & More! This is Ohio's longest running and most widely attended Comic Con! Brought to you by the group who produces the most widely attended Comic Con tour!

Columbus, OH
9/20-22/13

BARBECON -WWW.QUINTECONS.COM

Board, role-playing, and miniature gaming under two massive tents; rain or shine.

Amazing catered barbecue from a local, award-winning restaurant.

Clarkston, MI
9/21/2013

GRANDCon - WWW.GRAND-CON.COM

GrandCon features tabletop gaming in all its forms, as well as comic books and the creators behind them. We provide an atmosphere that will allow gamers and comic book fans to mingle and appreciate their shared interests.

Grand Rapids, MI
9/21-22/13

HURRICON - WWW.HMGSSOUTH.COM

Over 100 games from experienced game masters: some of the best historical gaming around, historical miniatures gaming & tabletop games of all kinds.

Orlando, FL
9/26-29/13

NUKE CON - WWW.NUKE-CON.COM

Nuke-Con is a not-for-profit, all volunteer organization dedicated to promoting the positive educational, social, and entertainment aspects in all types of gaming hobbies.

Omaha, NE
10/4-6/13

REALMS CON

Realms Con is a multi-genre convention that has been around over eight years and will cater to the public in the form of celebrities, celebrity anime voice actors, artists, gaming rooms, movie room,

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

costume contests, workshops, panels, and much more.

Corpus Christi, TX
10/4-6/13

COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS -

WWW.SWA-GAMING.ORG/COUNCIL [SW]

As with all the Councils over the years, our goal is a nice balance between role-play games, miniatures, board games, and other stuff.

Schenectady, NY
10/11-13/13

CON ON THE COB -

WWW.CONONTHECOB.COM [SW]

Four days of geeks, games, and madness.

Hudson, OH
10/17-20/13

CHARCON - [HTTP://CHARCON.ORG](http://CHARCON.ORG)

There will be a variety of RPGs at this year's convention. We have game masters running D&D 4th Edition, RPGA events, Post Apocalypse themed games, Superhero events and many others.

Charleston, WV
10/18-20/13

NASHVILLE COMIC CON -

[HTTP://WWW.WIZARDWORLD.COM/WIZCON.HTML](http://WWW.WIZARDWORLD.COM/WIZCON.HTML)

Join tens of thousands of fellow fans as they converge on the Music City Center at Nashville Comic Con to celebrate the best in pop culture. Nashville Comic Con brings it all - Movies, Comics, Toys, Video Gaming, Games, TV, Graphic Novels, Horror, Wrestling, MMA, Original Art, Collectibles, Anime, Manga & More! Nashville Comic Con is brought to you by the group who produces the most

widely attended Comic Con tour!

Nashville, TN
10/18-20/13

NECRONOMICON -

WWW.STONEHILL.ORG/NECMAIN.H

TM

Florida's science fiction, fantasy & horror convention.

Tampa, FL
10/18-20/13

CRYSTAL COAST CON -

WWW.CRYSTALCOASTCON.COM

The sci-fi, fantasy, and gaming experience will be a one day wondrous event.

Cape Carteret, NC
10/19/2013

GIRLGECKCON -

WWW.GEEKGIRLCON.COM

GeekGirlCon is a non-profit, volunteer-powered organization dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the contribution of women in all aspects of geek culture.

Seattle, WA
10/19-20/13

KOKOMO-CON -

WWW.KOKOMOCON.COM

Indiana's premier comic convention.

Kokomo, IN
10/19/2013

FLATCON - WWW.FLATCON.COM

Central IL's premier gaming event. Card games, board games, RPGs, historical minis, Warhammer, and more!

Bloomington, IL
10/25-27/13

ROCK-CON - WWW.ROCK-CON.COM

The convention features historical and fantasy miniature gaming, collectible

miniatures, role playing, collectible card and board gaming events covering the entire spectrum of adventure gaming.

Rockford, IL
10/25-27/13

CANADA

FAN EXPO CANADA -

WWW.FANEXPOCANADA.COM

Considered by many to be the "Comic Con" of Canada, Fan Expo Canada™ humbly began as the Canadian National Comic Book Expo in 1995. Growing from one genre with 1500 fans to a multifaceted show connecting over 90,000 fans, Fan Expo Canada™ is currently the 3rd largest pop culture event in North America!

Toronto, Canada
8/22-25/13

ENGLAND

RAIDERS OF THE GAME CUPBOARD -

WWW.RAIDERSOFTHEGAMECUPBOARD.CO.UK

One day gaming convention featuring board games, roleplaying, CCG, and many, many more.

Staffordshire
9/28/13

FURNACE -

[HTTP://RPGFURNACE.COM/](http://RPGFURNACE.COM/)

Furnace is a tabletop roleplaying game convention.

Sheffield, England
10/19-20/13

IRELAND

GAELCON -

WWW.GAELCON.COM/GAELCON

Gaelcon is Ireland's premier games convention which is a

gathering of gamers, who all come together in a certain place at a certain time for the same reason: to play games and have fun.

Dublin, Ireland
10/25-28/13

ISRAEL

ICON -

[HTTP://ICONFESTIVAL.ORG/IL/2013/](http://ICONFESTIVAL.ORG/IL/2013/)

ICON is an annual national festival of science fiction, fantasy, and role-playing games.

Tel Aviv, Israel
9/22-24/13

ONLINE

JACKER CON -

WWW.CONPLANNER.COM/CONVENTIONHOME.ASPX?C=122

A first of its kind for the Happy Jacks listeners (and hopefully some hosts) to get together online and play various RPG'S. We will plan on using Google + and probably some roll20. If it's successful maybe will make it a twice a year event!

Online
7/19-21/13

MONKEY CON -

[HTTP://WWW.CONPLANNER.COM/CONVENTIONHOME.ASPX?C=127](http://WWW.CONPLANNER.COM/CONVENTIONHOME.ASPX?C=127)

MonkeyCon Two is a virtual convention for roleplaying games. It is a celebration of the Monkeys Took My Jetpack podcast and homage to what they and the GutterSkypes have done for role playing games via Skype. The event is ticketless and free.

Online
10/18-19/13

Two novels, two great heroes!



Well hung and left for dead, Throb Hammerdong is quite annoyed....

Barbarian quarry worker Throb wakes up one day to find himself hanging by his neck from a bridge. Luckily for us, he doesn't die, but instead sets out on a quest for revenge.

Accompanied by his loyal crew and armed only with the latest weapons, a full stomach, and regular, almost constant sex, Throb must survive attack by bandits, go shopping, and sit through the worst live porn show on earth, before facing his enemies and sorting out the whole beaver thing.

Wayland Snowball doesn't want much from life. A fast car, huge amounts of money, and two gorgeous women with big... personalities.

Unfortunately, Wayland is one of life's losers; a shallow and work-shy youth whose only purpose in life seems to be to get drunk, upset people, and try to find a way for his only friend to lose his virginity.

But with a bit of luck, lots of luck, and unbelievable amounts of luck, even he may make something of himself.



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Steve
Dean

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Cover art
by Daniel
Kalliomaki.



Savage Insider Issue #9: Tales of the Weird is all about fantasy horror during the Victorian Era through World War II. The flagship article, **The Asylum**, presents a lengthy Victorian adventure in an abandoned asylum where the dead are quite restless. This adventure can be utilized in a number of settings and even combined with **The Mask Peddler** equipment corral article by purchasing a mask that can help, or hinder, your PCs while the GM can take some hints from **Combat Deadliness** to amp up the horror of the adventure.

Tales of the Weird is mostly an alternate history issue that takes different decades and combines them with fantasy horror (or weird). There is a mixture of content formats with a leaning toward the creepy, such as what you'd find in *Tales from the Crypt*.

Tales of the Weird includes:

- One full-length adventure.
- One investigative / survival adventure.
- Two fictional pieces.
- Weird masks.
- New options for combat.
- ... And much more!